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THE EARLY ENGLISH PRESS

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by

STACIA LIVINGSTON

THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

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THE EARLY ENGLISH PRESS.

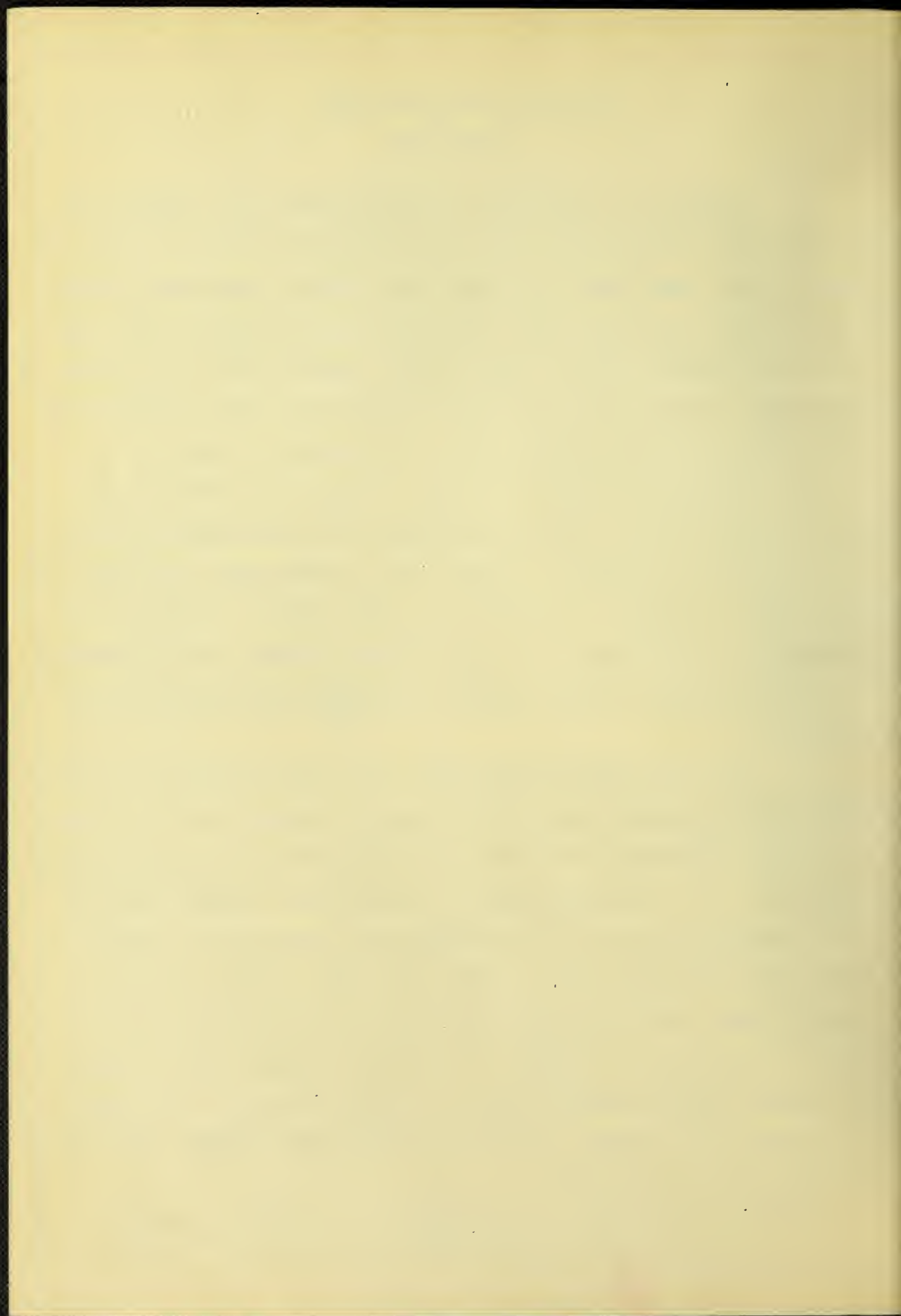
1477-1500.

England was suffering the death throes of a closing age. For over three hundred years the Plantagenets had held the throne and each of their kings made heroic and often almost superhuman efforts to accomplish impossible tasks. One after another they had met with inevitable failure. Foreign wars had been pushed with vigor but not to success. Foreign possessions had vanished one after another until much of her power and prestige among the nations was gone.

During the reign of the last kings civil wars had laid waste the land. Rival claims of noblemen led to the gathering together and arming of retainers on either side and the final prolonged conflict known as the War of the Roses in which much of the best blood of England was spilled, and the power of the nobility largely wrecked. So much of internal warfare crushed the genius and energies of the nation.

Out of so much for England's woe came also much for her weal. The Plantagenets laid the foundation of English self-government, of Scottish nationality and French patriotism. The seeds of the reformation were only seemingly crushed by Henry IV, who courted the power of the established church and suppressed the Reformation of Wyckliffe. Scholarship seemed to decline. The clergy were ceasing to be an intellectual class. Oxford had only one fifth of the scholars of a century before. No successor to Chaucer the greatest English poet of the age had arisen. The old literary class was dying out and in its stead a new interest in knowledge was arising. The spirit of the coming age was among the common people.

With the death of Richard III on the field of Bosworth the



the Middle Ages ended, with the accession of Henry VII of the House of Tudor came a new era ushering in the Renaissance and the Reformation.

At the close of the old era and the dawn of the new, one of England's greatest benefactors, himself a student and an active worker in the spread of knowledge, stands William Caxton printer, translator and editor.

CAXTON'S EARLY LIFE

Very little is known of the greater part of the life of this man whose memory should be cherished by England's people for generations innumerable. Patient and persevering searchers have gathered from the records of business associations, and churches and from occasional sentences in the prologues of his books the few facts that are known.

No positive mention has been found of his parents except that Caxton himself wrote in the prologue to "Charles the Grete" printed in 1485, 'I am bounden to pray for my fader and moder's souls that in my youthe sent me to schoole, by which by the suffraunce of God I get my living, I hope truely'. Nothing more has been discovered as to his schooling: probably he attended some local grammar school for a few years. In the prologue to the 'Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye' he says 'I was borne and learned myne English in Kente in the Weald.'

The first positive date in connection with the life of Caxton was found in some old records of the Mercer's Co. of London. The entry is for June 24, 1438, and records that William Caxton was apprenticed to Robert Large, a London mercer. The merchants of this time were a leading class of citizens and exclusive in their choice



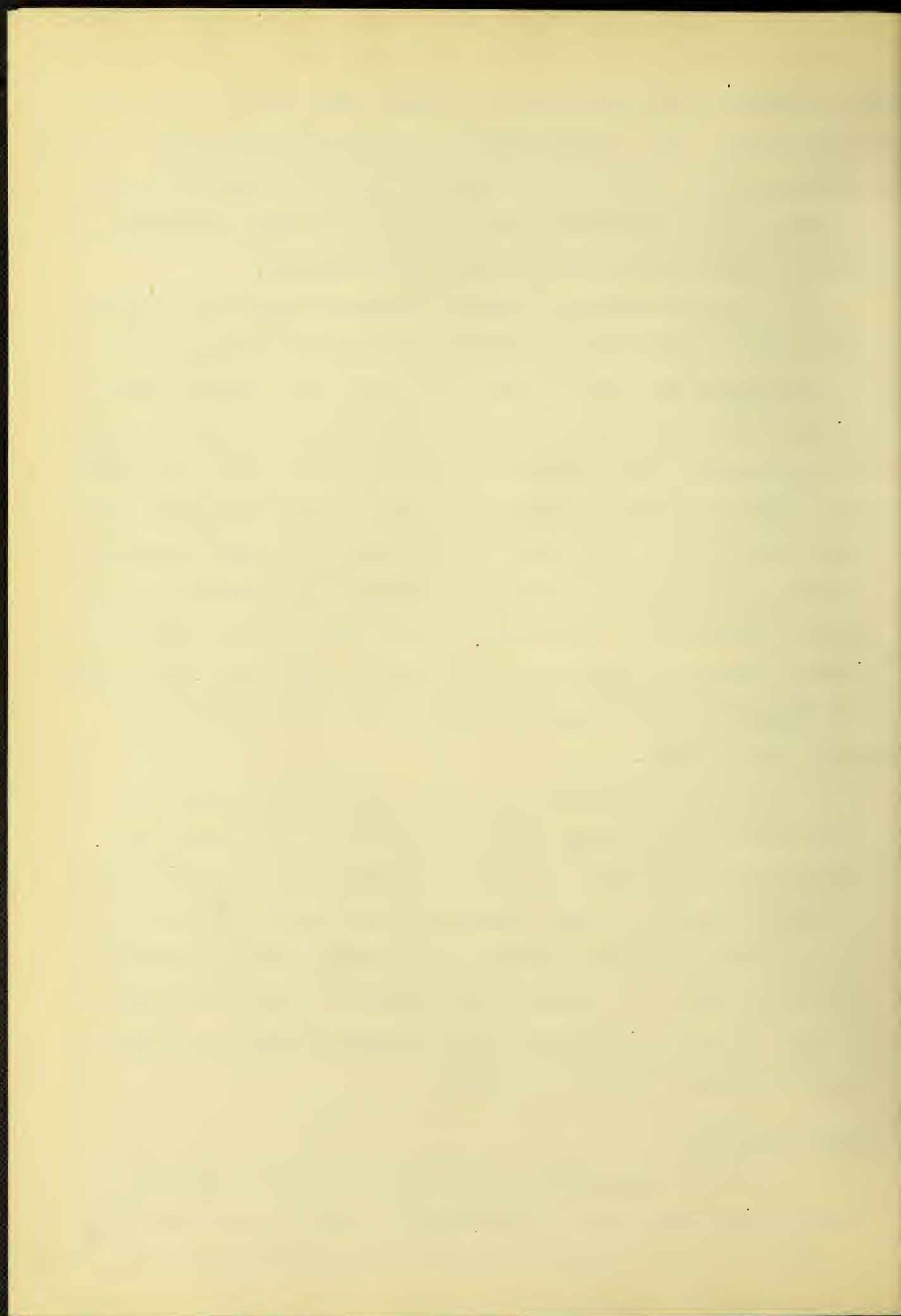
of apprentices. From the fact that Robert Large, one of the leading mercers of his time, received Caxton as an apprentice we may conclude that he was well born and from the fact that his parents had sent him to school we may judge that they were people of some prosperity and wished to start their son in a successful business.

Most authorities agree in assuming Caxton's age to have been sixteen at the time of entering his apprenticeship, which would fix the date of his birth as 1422. It is not very probable that he was older than this and he could not well have been younger because of the position he had attained in Bruges as early as 1449. Eleven years after he became an apprentice, when he became security for another merchant for the payment of 110 pounds. This must be taken as evidence that he was in business for himself and meeting with some success. Indentures at this time were so drawn that the apprentice became a freeman at the close of his twenty fourth year. This would make Caxton's term as apprentice about seven years and he would become free in 1446.

Robert Large must have been a man of some importance for it is recorded that he was sheriff in 1430 and nine years later became Lord Mayor of London. At this time Henry VI was on the throne and French was the official language of the country. It may well be supposed that it was while Caxton was a member of the household of Robert Large that he acquired his knowledge of the French language, and also during this time his provincial English must have been in some considerable measure corrected.

CAXTON AT BRUGES

Robert Large died in 1441 and in his will dated April 24 he bequeathed Caxton who was still in his employ, probably yet an



apprentice, the sum of twenty marks. This may be taken to show that Caxton was held in esteem by his master. The death of Large did not release Caxton from his apprenticeship. The full term of service must be completed if he wished to become a Mercer himself. Nothing more is known of his apprenticeship except that he was some time after this admitted to the livery of the Mercers' company which must be taken as proof that he served his full time. Blades says in his life of Caxton that "Executors were bound to provide the apprentices of a deceased trader with a new home; and it might seem that the original master might appoint a new master by his will or of his own accord assign the apprentice during his lifetime, without making the apprentice himself a party to the assignment. So far as we know, Large made no arrangement of this kind; and it appears probable that the usual course of providing a new master for the bereaved apprentice was adopted by the executors in Caxton's case. Moreover, it was not uncommon for young men in his position to be sent to some foreign town to obtain experience in trade. Wheeler says[†]"The Merchants Adventurers send their young men, sonnes and servants or apprentices who for the most part are Gentlemens sonnes to the Marten towns beyond the seas, there to learne good facions and knowledge in trade."

Whether Caxton left England by his own desire or at the instance of his new master, or by invitation of a foreign friend is unknown; but that he took up his abode in the Low Countries and probably at Bruges, in 1441, the year in which his first master died, we gather from his own words in the prologue to "The Recuyell" where he states that he had at that time, in 1471, been abroad for thirty

[†]Blades. Biography and typography of William Caxton. Ed.2.1882. p.14.

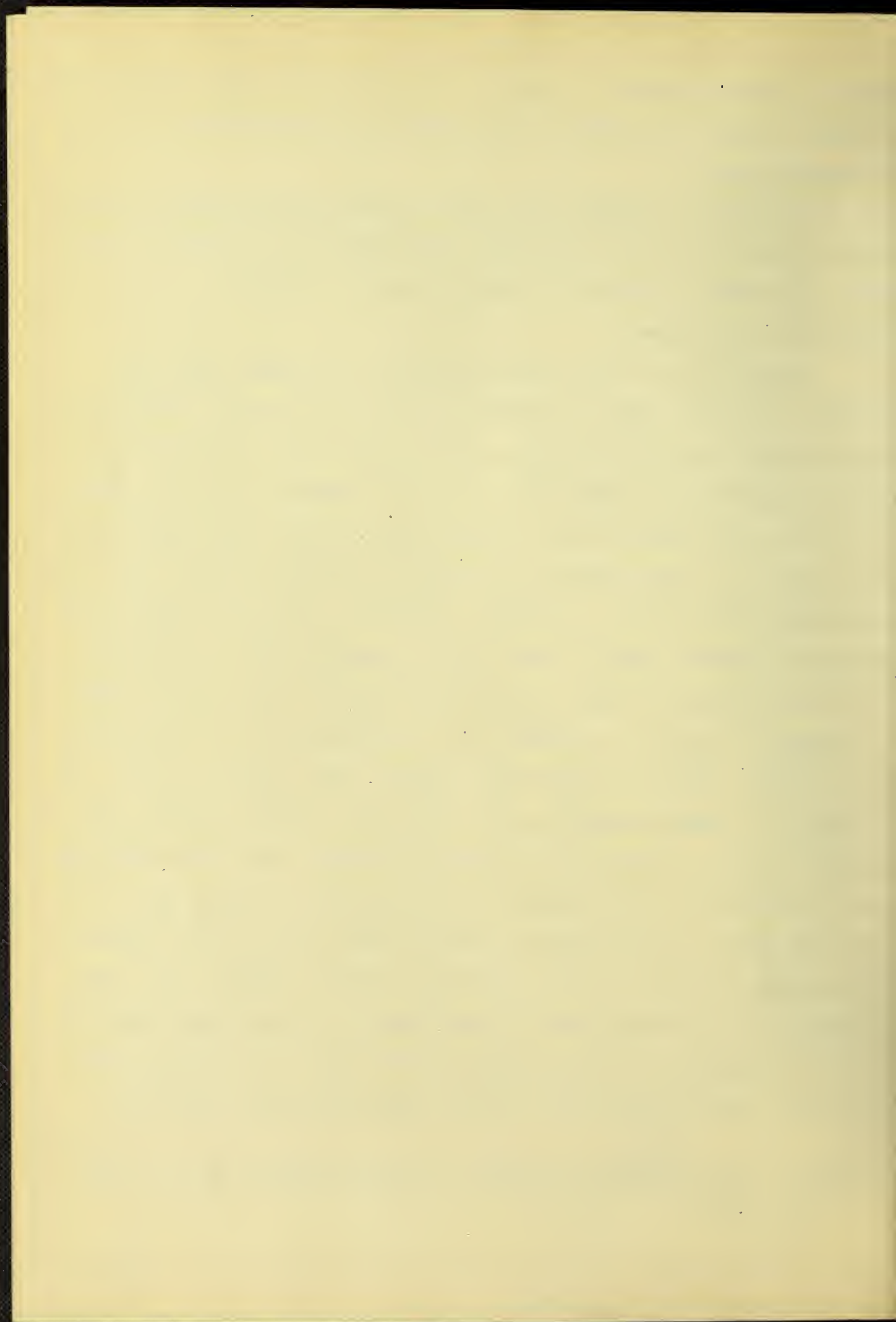


years. Thither probably he carried with him no more than twenty marks (equal to about 150 pounds at the present day) bequeathed to him by Alderman Large."

As an apprentice to Robert Large one of the leading mercers of London Caxton must have become acquainted with men of his calling at Bruges, then the leading commercial centre of the Low Countries, as well as the seat of government.

Philip the Good, at this time Duke of Burgundy, had been brought up at the court of England, so he very naturally favored the English merchants in his domain. Great privileges were granted to the Merchant Adventurers under the name of the English Nation by which title they were known in the foreign trade. Blades says that[†] "All foreign trade was then carried on by means of trading guilds. These associations which occupy a prominent position in the early history of European commerce, had in most cities a common place of residence, and were governed by laws and charters granted on one side by the government of their own country and on the other side by the government of the country in which they settled. They appear to have originated in a common necessity. The trader in a foreign country was always an object of suspicion to the inhabitants, and often found himself restricted by the laws as to the articles he should buy or sell, and the price he should give or receive. These laws being frequently unjust and subversive of all legitimate trade, besides being often strained to the great injury of individuals, it was found expedient for all traders in foreign lands to unite, and by combined action to secure that recognition of their rights which the individual

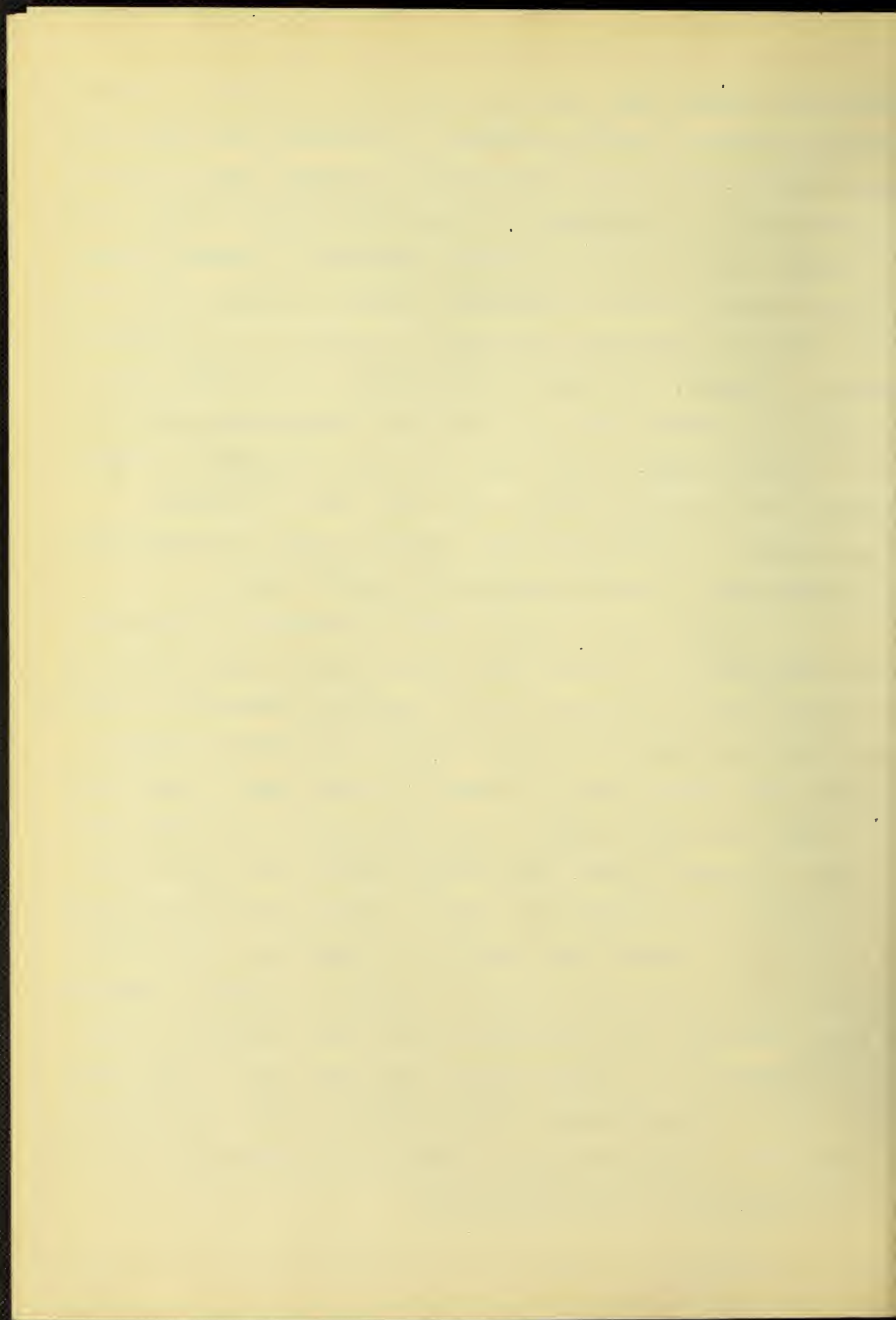
[†] Blades. Biography and typography of William Caxton. Ed. 2. 1882
p. 17-18.



could not obtain. Hence arose the association of Merchant Adventurers which consisted of English merchants who ventured their goods in foreign markets. Charters had been granted at various times by the English kings for the government of these associations. In April, 1462, a charter was granted for the better government of the English merchants residing in the Low Countries. During the latter half of the year Caxton was performing the duties of governor of the English merchants at Bruges, and later, in the records of the Mercers, he is addressed as Governor. How long he held this responsible position is not certainly known. In June 1468 the Princess Margaret, a sister of Edward IV was married to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy.

As governor of the English nation, Caxton no doubt saw much of the court and much of the English Noble who visited there.

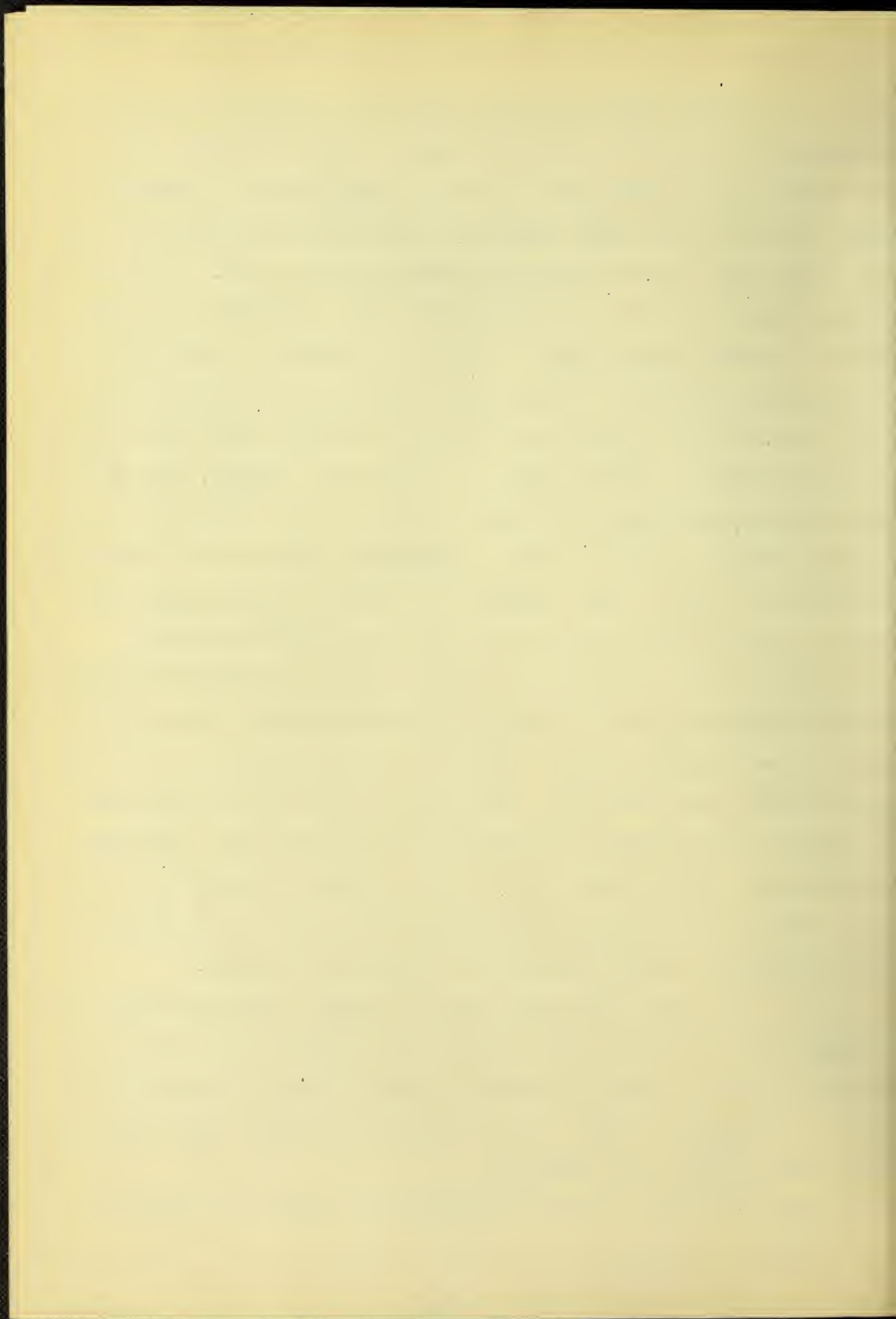
Caxton may have gained here the interest in literature and inspiration for the work that made him famous among all English speaking people. Philip the Good the immediate predecessor of Charles the Bold was a renowned collector of books and employed authors, translators and copyists at his court at Bruges and all over Europe to supply his library with the best productions of the times translated into modern French. Other rulers before Philip the Good had been patrons of literature but none had given so much encouragement to the art of letters. The fashion of the court was copied by the nobles and the wealthier classes and libraries containing most beautiful manuscripts were multiplied in the city. As governor of the English Nation it is quite probable that Caxton made friends among the nobles of the realm and obtained access to these collections of books. It is known that copies of many of the books afterward printed by Caxton were in these libraries.



In 1464 Edward IV gave Caxton and a Richard Whitehall a commission to confirm a treaty of commerce with Philip the Good. If Caxton had not before this made the acquaintance of members of this literary court, this commission gave him an opportunity to come in contact with some of the many scribes employed here. If not before he must have now had an opportunity to become acquainted with the Duke's private chaplain Raoul le Fevre the compiler of 'Recuyell of the Historyes of Troy' a French paraphrase of the leading passage of the Iliad. A richly illustrated manuscript copy had just been completed for the Duke, and the work soon became very popular. Caxton began the translation of this work into English in 1469; after having completed between 40 and 60 leaves of manuscript the work was laid aside probably for lack of time. Commerce was now in a flourishing condition and the work of his office must have been considerable. In October of the following year (1470) the Earl of Warwick compelled Edward IV and many of his nobles to flee from England. They took refuge at the Burgundian court. Caxton if still governor or as a leading citizen could have great influence in assisting his countrymen in their affairs until the restoration of the king. The assistance that he was able to give at this time, possibly to the king in exile and surely to the English merchants may have won for him favor of the king which he later enjoyed as a printer in England.

It is not known when Caxton resigned his governorship nor exactly when he entered the service of the Duchess. All authorities seem to agree in finding evidence in Caxton's own prologues that he was in the service of the Duchess in 1471, two years after beginning the translation of the "Recuyell".

His desire for more leisure to indulge in a taste for literature

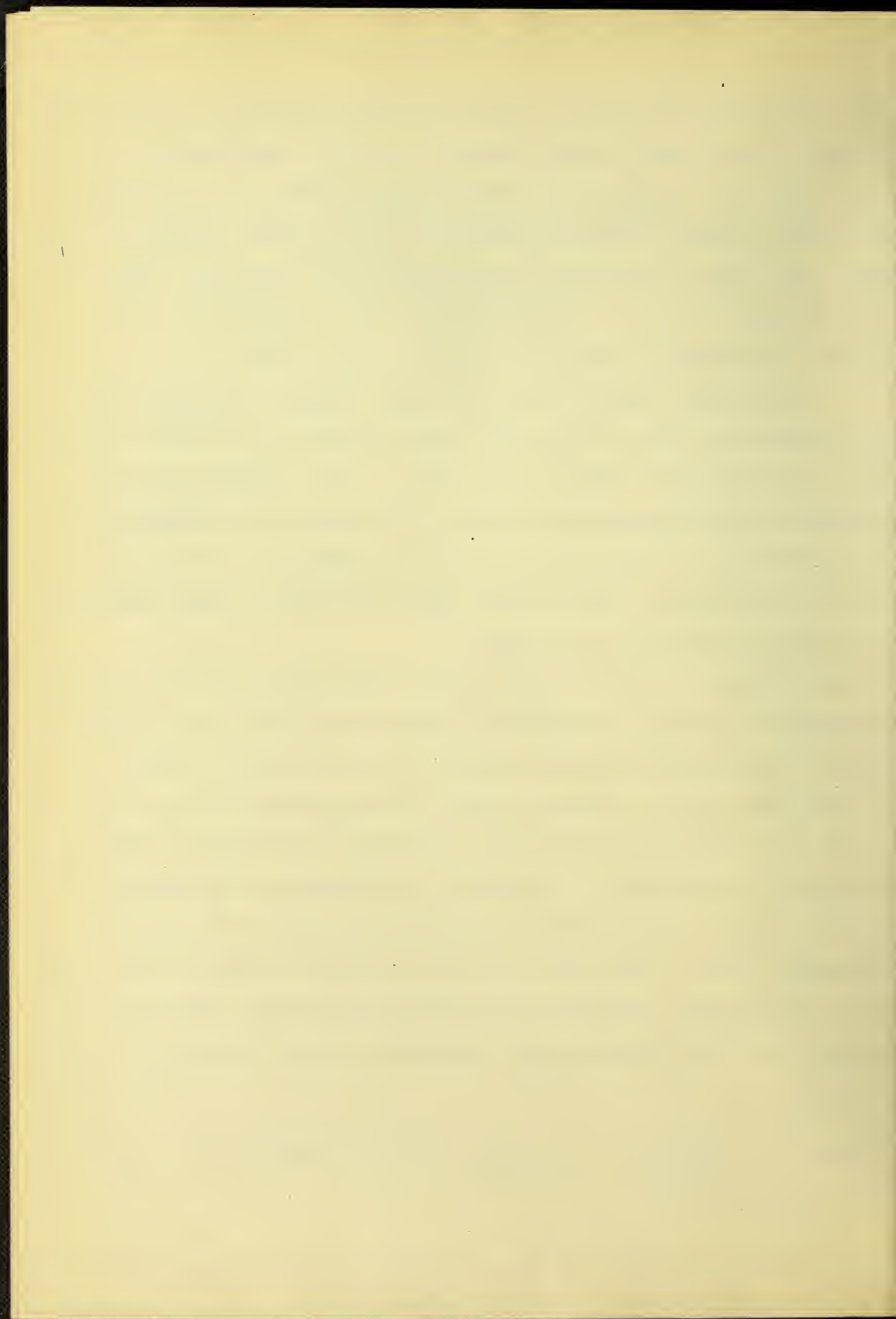


that must have been greatly fostered if not acquired by his residence of some thirty years in this literary capital, and possibly declining health and advanced years induced him to give up his prominent position to enter the private service of the Duchess. Certain it is that work upon the translation of the "Recuyell" was again taken up and the whole finished in September of 1471 and presented to the Duchess who rewarded Caxton in some way for his work.

It is quite possible to believe that Caxton, a thorough man of business as he must have been from the positions he is known to have held, was farsighted enough to see that a work that had become so popular in the French might be equally in demand in the English language. Further, he might quite properly be supposed to have had in mind the advantage of multiplying copies to supply a great demand by employing the new art of printing.

In the Prologue to Book I Caxton relates the causes that led him to undertake the translation:[†] "When I remembre that every man is bounden by the commandment and councyll of the wyse man to eschewe slouthe and ydleness whyche is moder and nourysshare of vyces and ought to put myself unto vertuous occupation and beysenesse / Than I haveynge no grete charge of ocupacion folowyng the sayd councyll / toke a frenche boke and redde therein many strange and meruayllous historyes where I had grete pleasyr and delyte / as well for the nouelte of the same as for the fayr langage of frensche, whych was in prose so well and compendiously sette and wretton / whiche me thought

[†]Blades. Biography and typography of William Caxton. Ed. 2. 1882.

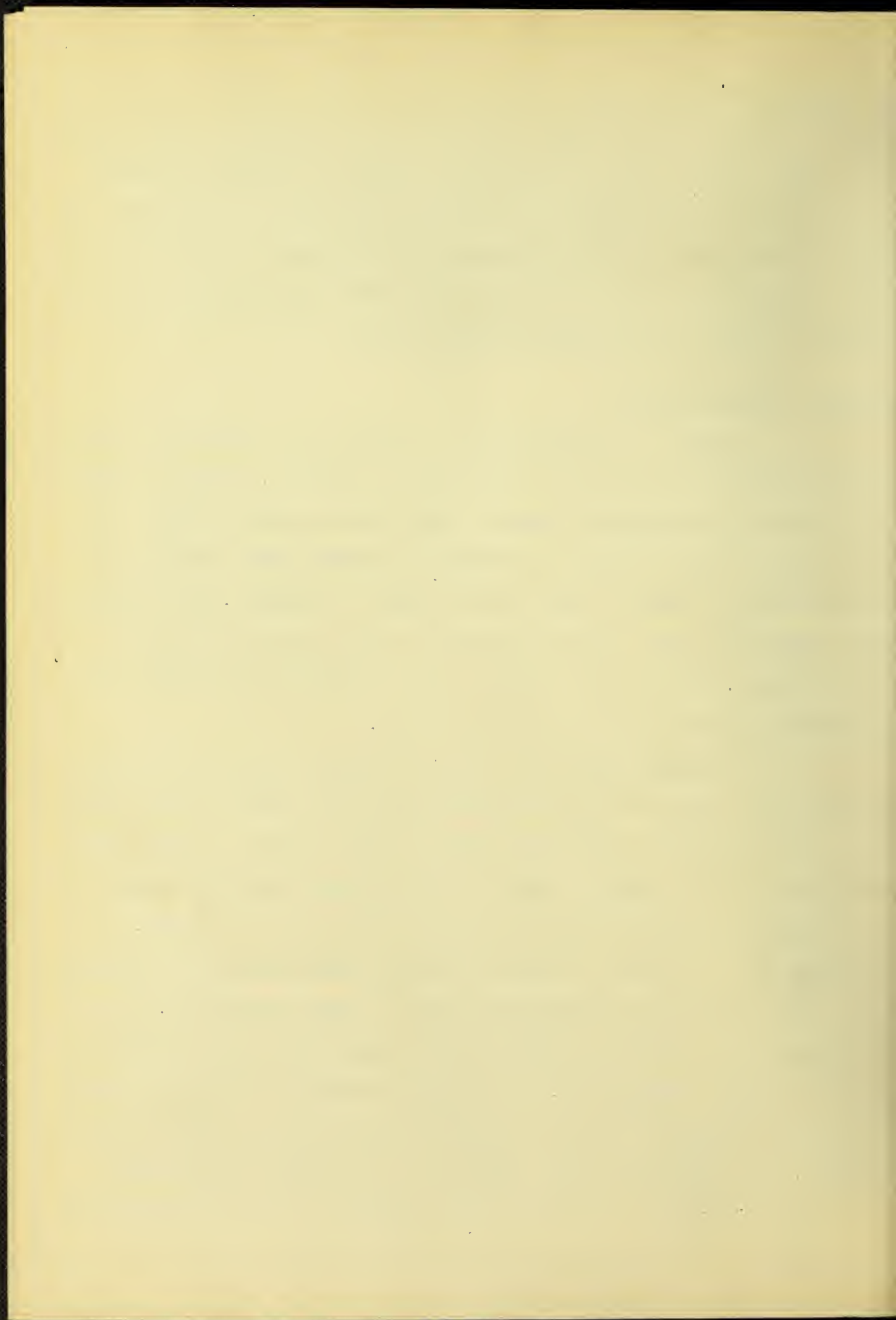


I understood the sentence and substance of every matter/ And for so moche as this booke was newe and late mad and drawn in the Frensche/ and never had seen hit in our english tongue/ I thought in myself hit shold be a good beysnes to translate hit into oure english / to the end that hyt myght be had as well in the royaume of England as in other landes/ and also for to passe therewyth the tyme and thus concluded in myself to begynne this sayd worke."

CAXTON LEARNS PRINTING

It must be remembered that at this time French was yet the language of the court and of literature in England. As may be expected, a work in the English language soon became widely popular, not only among those who were accustomed to secure their reading in French but also among a much larger number of readers. The demand for the translation soon became much greater than could be supplied by the copyists. At this time Caxton began to plan for producing new copies of his work by the art of printing.

The great demand for books at Bruges caused the various artists connected with the bookmaking trade to receive much encouragement. Excellence of workmanship was so highly prized by Duke Philip the Good that in order to meet the requirements the work became highly specialized and numerous classes of workmen were employed. Bookmaking soon became so important that a trade guild was organized much like the trading companies in other lines of commerce. In 1454 this guild was granted a formal charter under the name of "The Guild of St John the Evangelist". The business record of this guild showing the entrance fees of original members is preserved in the Archives at Bruges, and from this record much of the present information as to the branches of industry then employed in the manufacture of



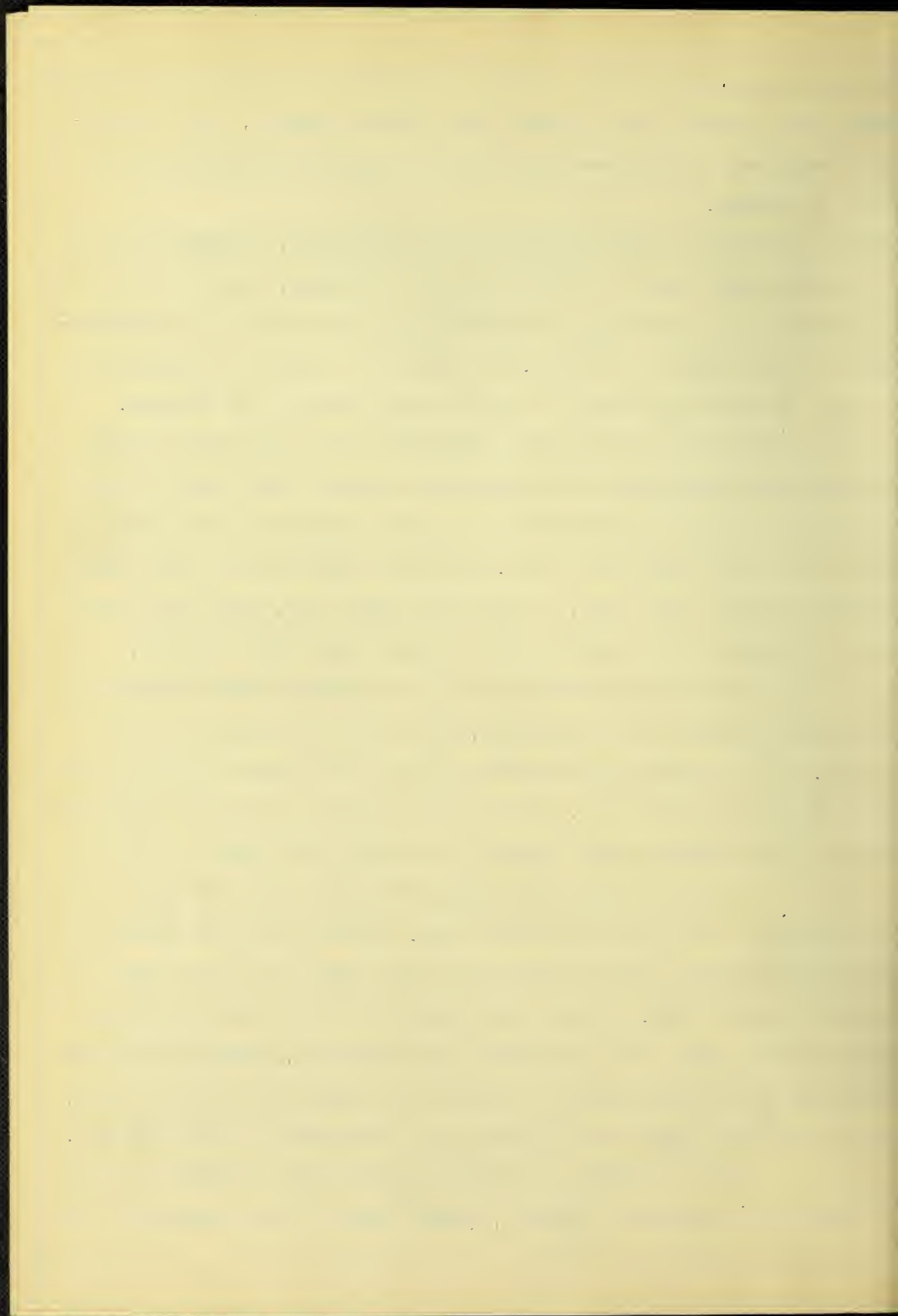
a book and names of those probably concerned in printing is obtained. Among the artistic book writers was a Colard Mansion, who is generally supposed to have been the first to introduce printing in the city of Bruges.

Little is known of the history of Colard Mansion. His name is said to appear many times in the old records at Bruges, always in some way relating to his trade as a writer of fine manuscripts or in connection with the Guild of St John. His work as a printer was carried on in one or two rooms over the porch of the church of St Donatus. He followed in his printing the practice of the manuscript writers in not dating and often not signing the printed works from his press. Twenty-two works are believed to have been printed at this press. The first dated book is in 1476. This is a large folio of 500 pages. The next book, dated 1477, is about the same size. From this it may well be assumed that Mansion never printed books very rapidly.

In assigning possible dates to undated books various typographical features are considered, among them the spacing of the lines. The earliest printed works followed the manuscript in not having the lines spaced even. Early in the history of the art the appearance of the work was much improved by spacing the lines.

Among the books from Mansion's press five have been found in which the lines are not spaced even. The 1476 book is spaced, so the conclusion is that the five books not spaced must have been printed before 1476. If the books previous to this were not issued more rapidly than the first dated books indicate, Mansion must have started his work as printer at Bruges some time about 1471 or 1472, not long after Caxton had finished the translation of the Recuyell.

After a careful comparison of the work of Mansion and the first work attributed to Caxton, Blades comes to the conclusion that



Caxton must have learned the art of printing at Mansion's press in Bruges. The strongest evidence being the identity of the type employed. A careful study of [†]pages of Caxton's type number 2 and Mansion's type number 2 shows the letters to be alike in form even to small details. This would point to the supposition that Caxton's type at least came from the same source as Mansion's. The failure to find similar type used at Cologne and its close resemblance to the work of local scribes naturally leads to the conclusion that a local artist was employed to cut the type.

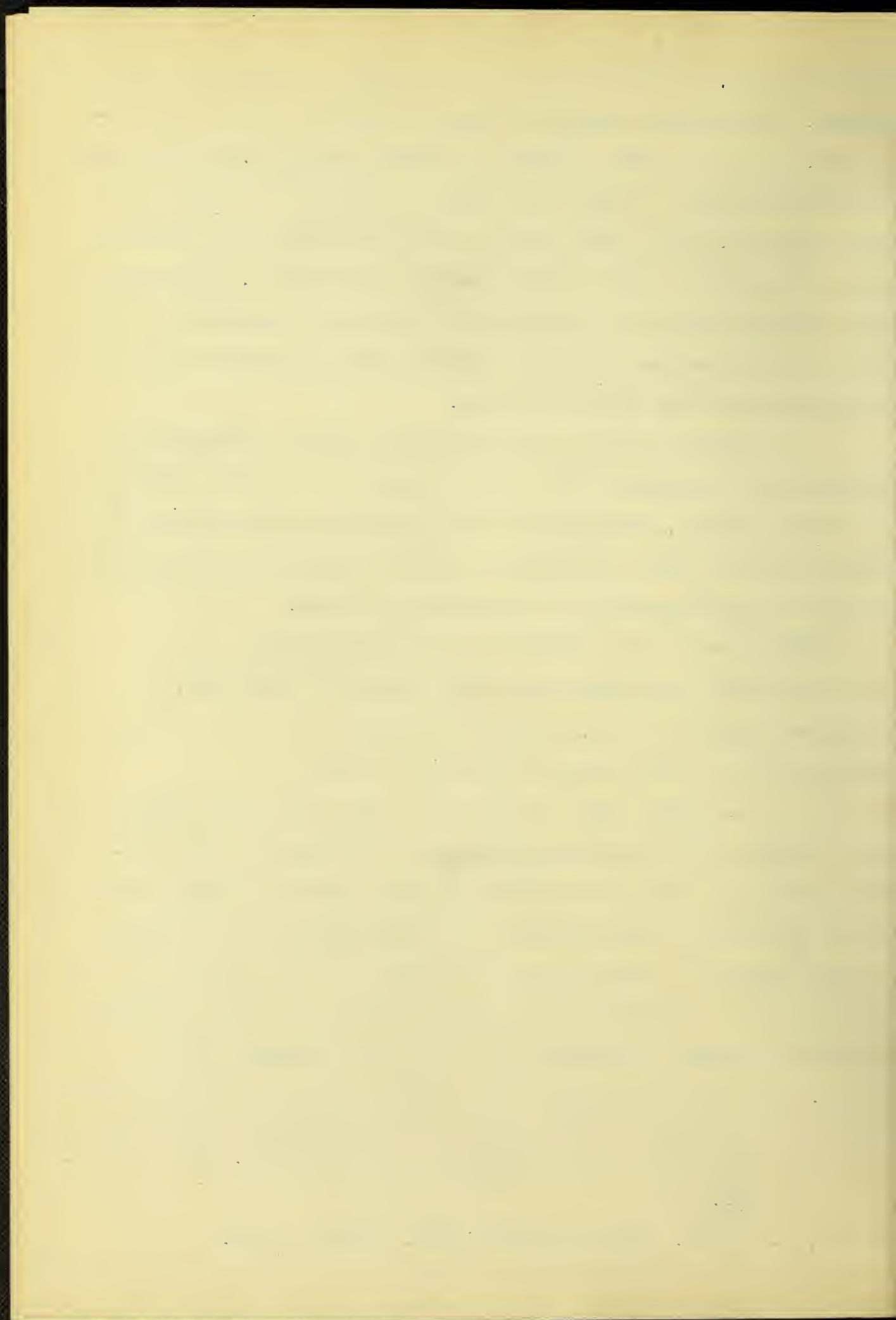
Largely in the consideration of literary evidence the opinion has been advanced that Caxton learned the art of printing of a Cologne printer, the support of this opinion consisting mainly of the following verse of Wynkyn de Worde at the end of the English edition of Bartholomaeus de Proprietatious Rerum:

±"And also of your charyte call to remembrance
The soul of William Caxton the first prynter of this book,
In laten tongue at Colyn, himself to avaunce
That every well disposed man may thereon loke."

E. Gordon Duff, writing at a later date than Blades holds this opinion and further supports it by recording the discovery of a few leaves of a copy of the Bartholomaeus printed in Latin at Cologne about the time of Caxton's visit when he completed the translation of the "Recuyell" and also the discovery of a book printed by Veldemer at Louvain in 1475 in two sorts of type, one almost identical to that of Caxton and Mansion and the other Evidently after a Cologne model. Authorities advancing this opinion assume that Caxton founded

[†]Blades. Biography and typography of William Caxton. Ed. 2. 1882. plates 5 & 6.

±Duff, E. Gordon. Early printed books. 1893. p.127.



a partnership with Mansion about 1475, at which time they began the printing of the "Recuyell", the first book printed in the English language.

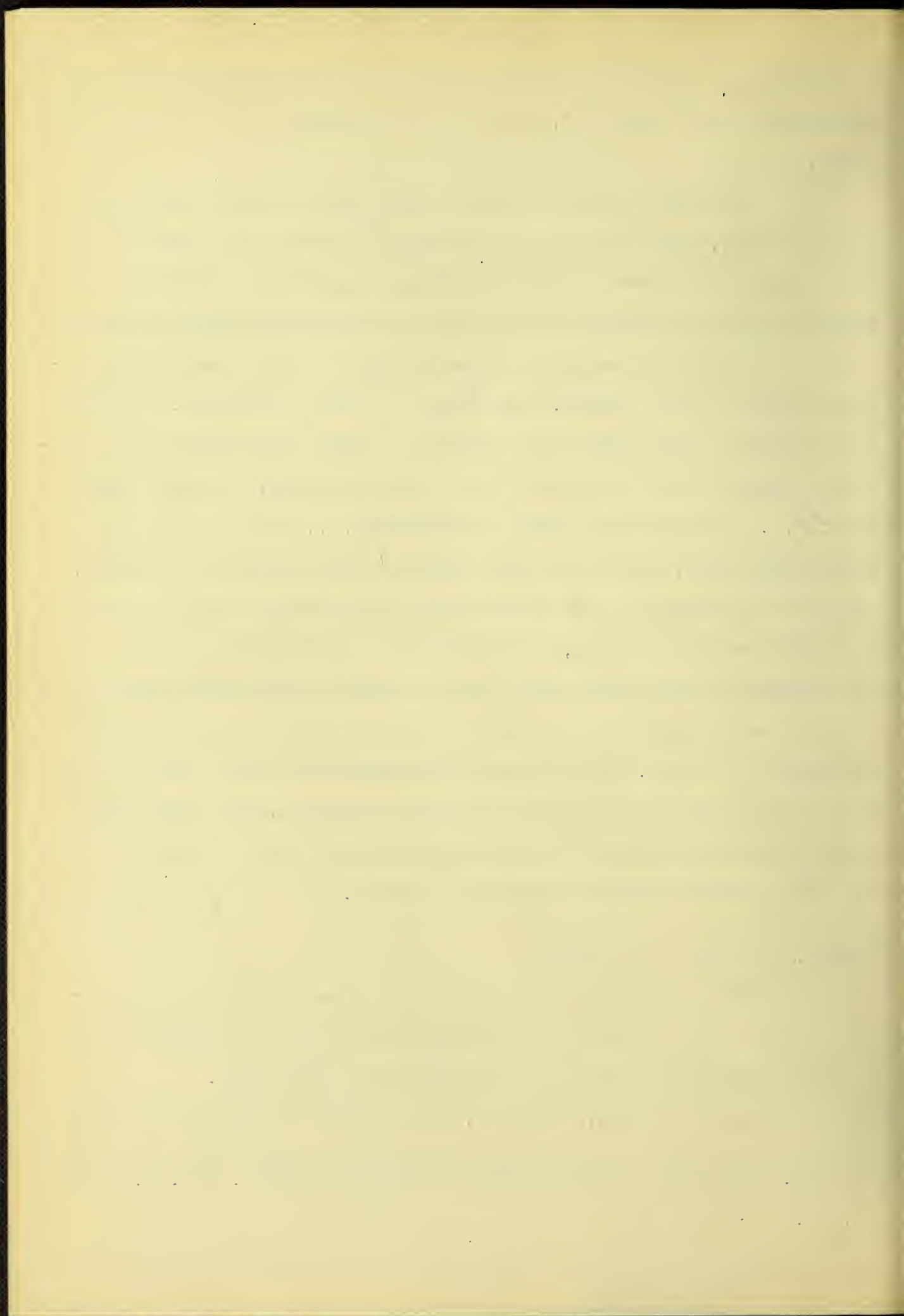
It hardly seems probable that Caxton learned printing as early as 1471, and then did not practice the art until some two or three years later when he could no longer supply the requests of the English nobles at Bruges for copies of his work as rapidly as desired.

After the success of the "Recuyell" Caxton translated another book from the French: the "Game and Playe of Chesse." Nothing is positively known about the printing of this book except the information given in the prologue to the second edition, in which Caxton says:[†]".... an excellent doctor of divinity.... made a book of chesse moralized, which, at such time as I was resident in Bruges, came into my hands.... and to the end which have not seen it nor understand French nor Latin, I deliberated in myself to translate into our maternal tongue; and when I had so achieved the said translation, I did do set in imprinte, a certain number of them which anon were dispeashed and sold." From this it is evident that the first edition was printed and disposed of in the city of Bruges. One date, 1474, given in the prologue to the first edition may refer to the printing but most probably refers to the translation.

CAXTON, A PRINTER IN ENGLAND

The history of Caxton's career from 1471 to the appearance of his first dated book at Westminster 1477 is founded on conclusions drawn from scant and unsatisfactory evidences. Between these two dates, thus far, no definite statement as to the

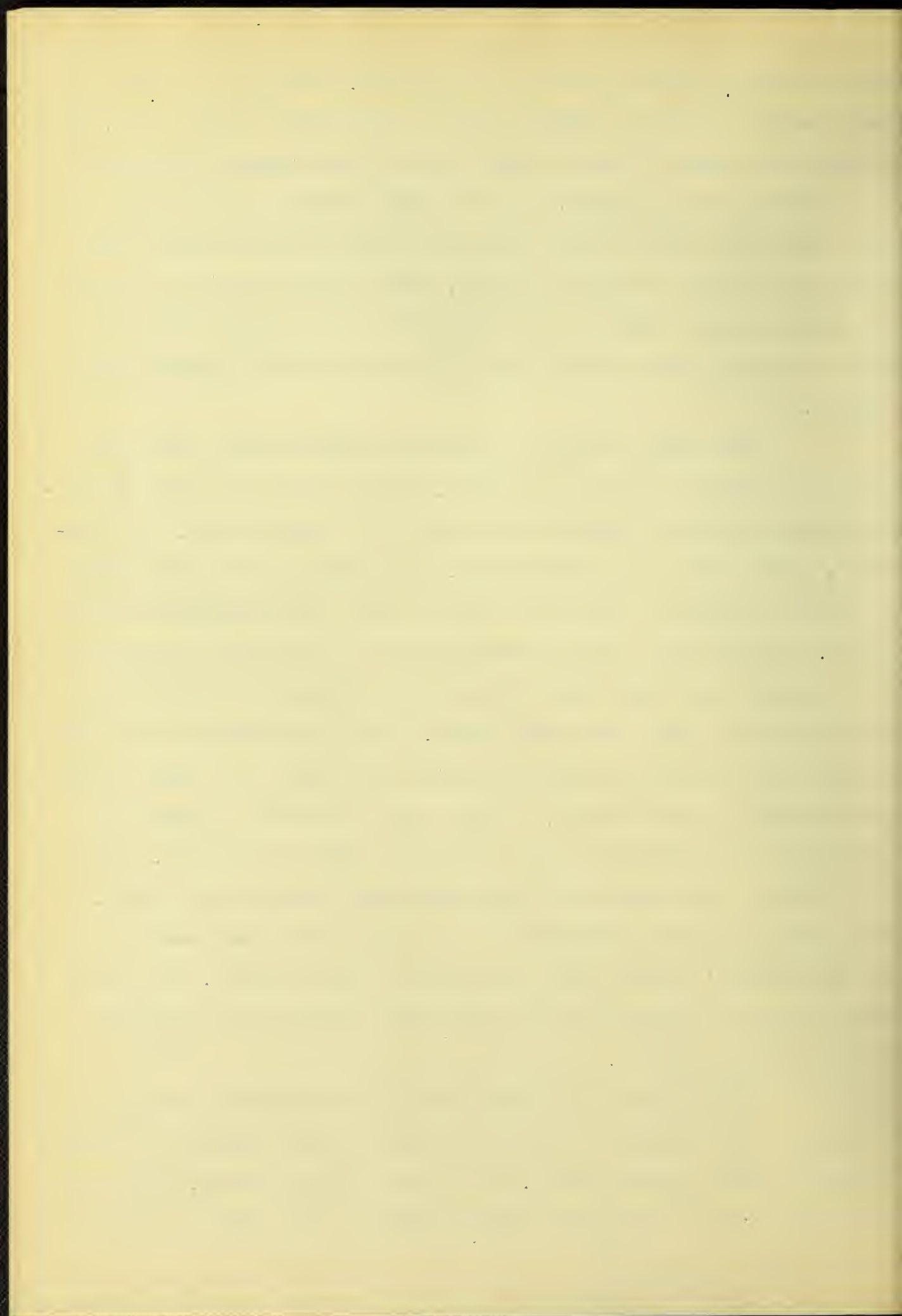
[†] Blades. Biography and typography of Willian Caxton. Ed. 2. 1882. p. 59.



work or plans seems to have been discovered. Certain it is that he had learned the art of printing and had left Bruges before 1477, where he had lived some 35 years, taking with him the necessary supplies for his printing establishment. In 1477 Caxton issued his first book bearing a definite date and the name of the place of publication: "The Dictes and sayings of Philosophers". With this the first book printed in England Caxton entered upon that period of his career which has made his name famous and his life of interest to all English speaking people.

The exact location of Caxton's residence and press has been the subject of much speculation. Nearly every writer on the subject seems to have a theory of his own as to where it was. All, however, agree that it was Westminster. The imprint of 20 books listed by Blades, ranging in date from 1447 to 1489 give Westminster as the place of publication. In an advertisement of some books, supposed to be printed about 1480, Caxton directs the purchaser to come to the almonry at the sign of the "Red pale". From this direction the conclusion is reasonably drawn that Caxton was living in a house called the Red-pale in the Almonry, a place where the mother of Henry VII had built alms houses and where alms were given to the poor. There is no evidence of a reason why this particular locality was chosen. From the rent rolls of the Abbey it has been found that some members of the Mercers' Company held tenements in this vicinity. This might have influenced Caxton in his choice and it might have had nothing whatever to do with it.

The almonry was in the Parish of St Margaret and among the records of this parish an entry of charges for the burial of William Caxton in 1479 has been found. This is all that is known. Merely the fact that a man of the same name was buried in the parish in which the



printer Caxton lived. It has been suggested by various authorities that this man may have been Caxton's father. Nothing stronger than the above statements prompts the suggestion. Another entry for 1490 records the burial of a Maud Caxton. There is no evidence of any relationship between this woman and Caxton. It is only possible that she may have been his wife. A paper discovered among the records of the Exchequer at one time kept in the Chapter house at Westminster shows that Caxton had a daughter Elizabeth who married Jerard Croppe, a merchant taylor of Westminster. The paper is dated May 20, 1496, but is unsigned and it bears no seals. The subject matter is an agreement of separation and the settlement of the legacy left by Caxton to his daughter. Whoever may have been Caxton's wife he must have married after leaving the employ of the Mercers' Company at Bruges about 1469. The mercers abroad lived in the Mercers' house as in a monastery, under strict rules and regulations, no women being allowed in the residence. The above statements include all that is known of Caxton's private life.

His friends are only known of from their names appearing in business accounts or in the prologues of Caxton's books. Blades says that[†] "Caxton did not enter upon his new venture of printing books without good and able patronage. Edward IV... paid him a sum of money for certain services performed; and Caxton printed "Tully" and "Godfrey" under the king's "protection." The king's sister Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, was his friend and supporter... Margaret, Countess of Richmond, mother of King Henry VII, also favored his designs. Earl Rivers, brother to the queen, was a fast friend with whom Caxton seems to have enjoyed a considerable degree of inti-

[†] Blades. Biography and typography of William Caxton. Ed. 2. 1882. p. 80-81.



macy, and the Earl of Warwick likewise must have had some knowledge of him, as Caxton dedicated to him the "Chess-Book". The "Order of Chivalry" was dedicated to Richard III. Henry VII personally desired Caxton to translate and print the "Fayts of Arms", and the "Eneydos" was especially presented to Arthur, Prince of Wales, Master William Daubeney, King Henry VI's treasurer, was a "good and singular friend". William, Earl of Arundel, took great interest in his progress, and allowed him the "yearly fee" of a buck in summer and a doe in winter. Sir John Fastolf, a great lover of books, of whose library several volumes still exist; Hugh Bryce, mercer, and king's ambassador; William Pratt, a rich mercer; and divers unnamed "gentylnen and ladyes" are known to have employed him. Some of these like the "noble lady with many faire daughters" for whom he produced "The Knight of the Toure" engaged him to translate as well as to print."

Caxton brought to his new undertaking at Westminster the experience of years of active business life and unlike many of the early printers on the continent succeeded in making his living by his printing press. That he was an indefatigable laborer is shown by the number of books that he printed during the thirteen years that his press was in operation. One hundred books have been identified as coming from Caxton's press, estimated as at least 18000 pages, the most of them being folio. During his life time three of his books were issued in a third edition and about twelve of them in a second edition. Some forty of Caxton's works are known only from fragments, sometimes consisting of a single leaf found in the binding of an old book in the older libraries as the library of St Albans and Cambridge University. From this we may quite safely judge that much of the printing of pamphlets, of poems, of Service books and various hand books may have disappeared entirely thus leaving the estimate of



the amount of printing a low one.

Caxton's wonderful energy and perseverance is still further shown by the list of his translations, -Excluding the "Recuyell" and the "Chess Book" translated at Bruges, Blades gives the following list of translations:

"The whole life of Jason; The Mirror of the World; Reynart the Fox; the book called Caton; The Knight of the Tower; Aesop's Fables; The Order of Chivalry; The Royal Book; The Life of Charles the Great; The History of the Knight Paris and the Fair Vienne; The Book of good Manners; The Doctrinal of Sapience; The Fayts of Arms; The Art and craft to die well; The Curial; The Life of St Winifred; Blanchardin, and Eglantine; The Four Sons of Aymon; and the Gouvernayle of health These contain more than 4500 pages." This list also omits the "Vitae Patrum" which Wynkyn de Worde, Caxton's pupil and successor, tells us in the prologue was finished on the last day of his life.

1491 is probably the year of Caxton's death. The entry in the parish register is undated except that it is under the list of burials for 1490-92. Blades thinks that the position of the entry on the page would indicate some time in the year 1491, and to confirm this opinion quotes the following note which he finds quoted in Ames:

"There is wrote down in a very old hand in a Fructus Temporum of my friend Mr Ballard's of Camden, in Gloucestershire;- Of your charitee pray for the soul of Mayster Wyllyam Caxton, that in his time was a man of moche ornate and moche renommed wysdome and conning, and de-
cessed ful crystenly the yere of our Lord MCCCCLXXXIJ."

Caxton was buried in his own parish churchyard and a number of

Blades. Biography and typography of William Caxton. Ed. 2. 1882.

p.83.

——— p.85.



authorities quote the entry of charges for the torches used and the tolling of the bell at the funeral, stating that they are considerably higher than the fees paid by the majority. This is taken as an evidence of Caxton's high position in the parish.

Search has been made in every possible place for a will of Caxton's but no trace of such a paper has been found. Very likely his property consisted of very little or nothing aside from the unsold copies of his books and the appliances of his printing establishment. As we shall see later Wynkyn de Worde succeeded to the printing outfit. Any remaining copies of books were probably otherwise disposed of. The parish accounts of St Margaret's show the receipt of fifteen copies of the Golden Legend bequeathed it by William Caxton.

These are recorded as sold to various parties during the next five or six years. These copies must have been of the second edition of the 'Legend' printed about 1489. It is not likely that a second edition would be printed while copies of a first edition printed in 1484 remained unsold.

In 1887 in honor of the four hundredth anniversary of the introduction of printing into England a Caxton celebration was held and a public exhibit of his books given at South Kensington Museum. Mr Blades was very active in promoting the undertaking and securing the material for the exhibit. In all the search that was made no authentic autograph of Caxton was discovered.

Servis, in his life of Caxton, and Ames, in his *Typographical antiquities*, published a supposed portrait of Caxton. Dr Dibdin thus accounts for it: "A portrait of Burchiello, the Italian poet, from an octavo edition of his work on Tuscan poetry of the date of

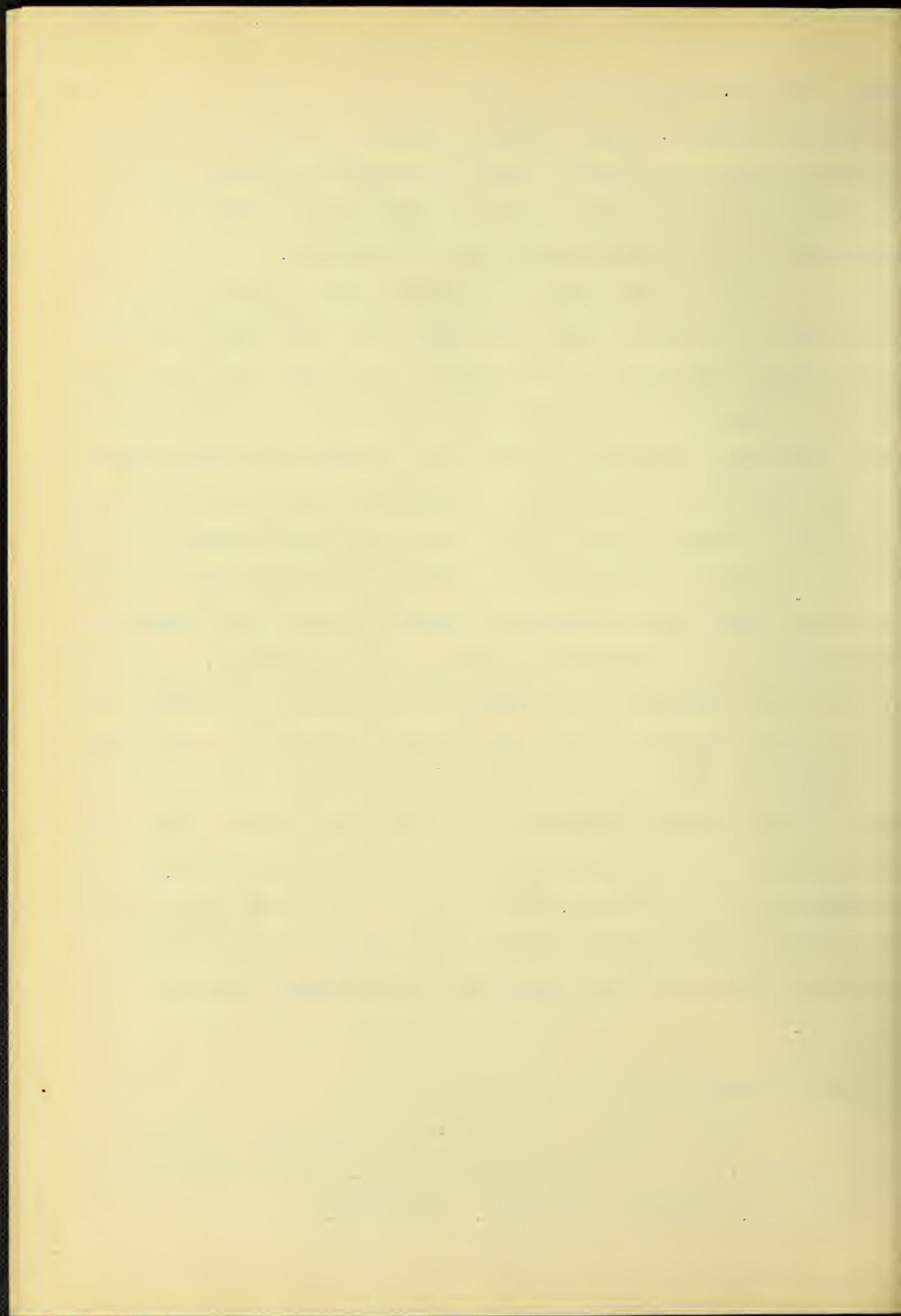


1554, was incorrectly copied by Faithorne for Sir Hans Sloane as the portrait of Caxton." This portrait, changed by addition of a heavy beard, is the one printed by Servis and copied by others. Blades thinks that from the inscription "inv Bagford" upon the plate the suggestion for its use may have come from Bagford.

Good judgment and keen foresight were shown by Caxton in the choice of books for his press. While the early printers of Germany devoted their work to the cause of the church and issued large, costly volumes of the Scriptures that involved their undertaking in ruin, and while Sweynheim and Pannarts in Rome devoted their energies to the great work of collecting the ancient classics and putting them into print, Caxton printed not for the clergy and educated alone but for all classes. An examination of the list of books from his press reveals a long list of romances, classed today as light literature for the most part translated by himself from the French. England was at this time suffering from foreign wars and rent by internal strife and was not prepared to read the classics, poetry and history, the appreciation of which requires culture and learning. Tales of chivalry and stories of brave heroes were what the people wanted and Caxton supplied the demand, as far as possible, both to the pleasure of his readers and his own profit. For the use of the clergy Caxton printed a number of Service books and Psalters, but there was no demand for copies of the Bible hence Caxton did not undertake the task of printing one.

CAXTON, A LITERARY MAN

Caxton's first interest seems to have been literature and not printing. He was, judging from his work, a man of considerable



learning. Writers upon the literature of his time compare his work favorably with contemporary writers. He was well versed in French as the language of the court at Bruges and he translated many of his books from that language. He must have had a considerable knowledge of Latin as he printed several books in that language as well as a number of copies of "Indulgences". Further he translated from the Latin into English. In the 'Life of Saynt Rocke', in the English translation of the 'Golden Legend' Caxton says, "Which lyff is translated oute of latyn into englysshe by me wyllam Caxton".

After his long residence in the Low Countries he must also have been thoroughly familiar with the Flemish or Dutch language. From this language he translated one book, The History of Reynard the Fox.

Caxton must have had a high appreciation of poetry for he printed all of any merit that had been written at the time and he speaks of Chaucer as "the first founder of ornate eloquence in our English". Finding that there were mistakes in his first edition of the Canterbury Tales he took great pains to reprint the work in the second edition.

As an author, Caxton wrote long prologues and epilogues to the books he translated and often added to the text of the work as in "Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers" translated by Earl Rivers where he appended a satire on women, and his copy of Aesop's Fables to which he added a fable of his own. At one time Caxton was best known as a historian. When he printed the Chronicles of England known as the "Chronicle of Brule" he added to the text bringing the history nearly down to 1480, the date of publication. The "Polycronicon", a national history written in the middle of the fifteenth century and supposed to have been very popular at the time, was translated into English toward the close of the century by Trevisa.

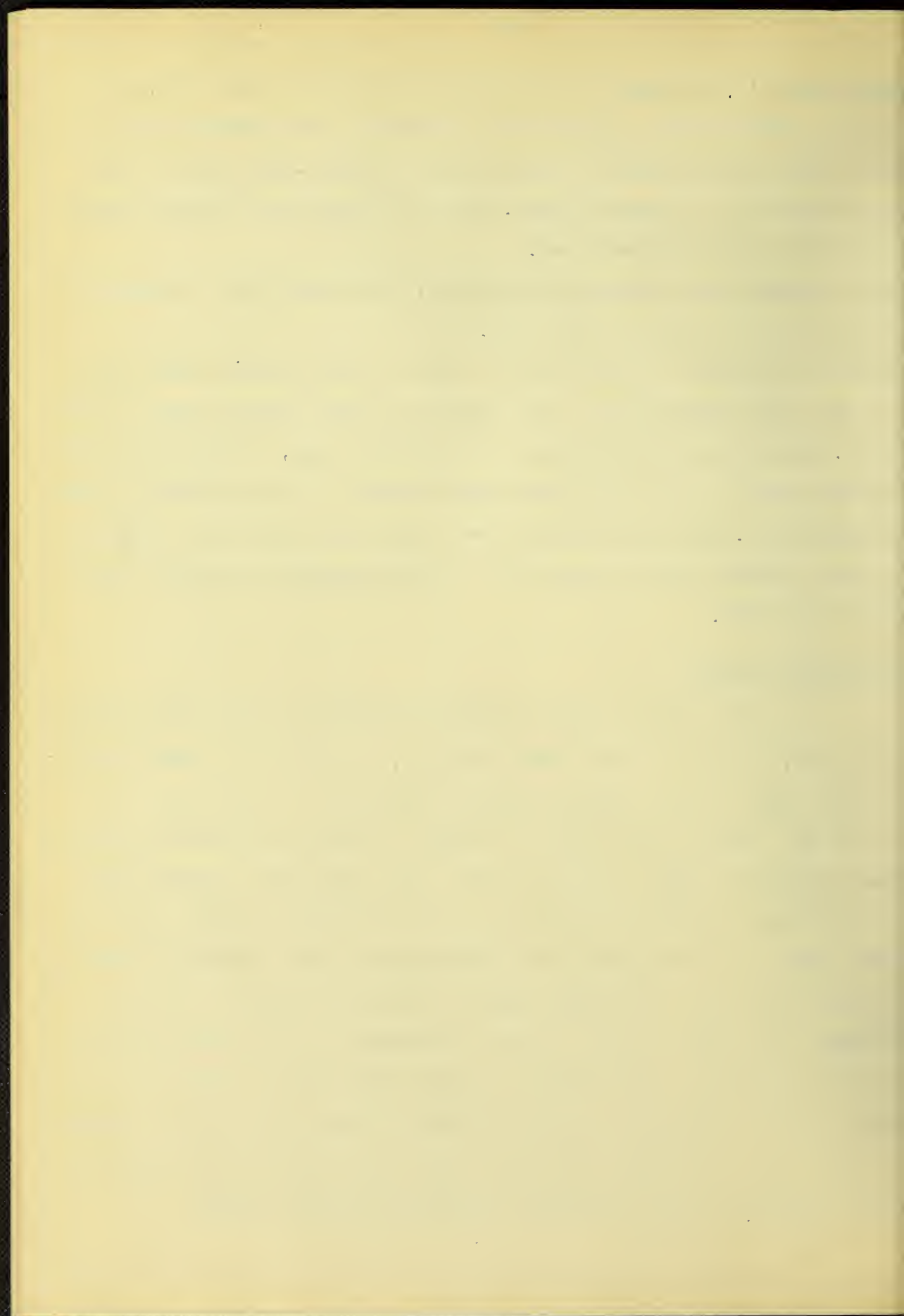
Upon Caxton's obtaining the English text sometime about 1481, he greatly modified the old English of Trevisa's and continued the history down to the middle of the fifteenth century. The title of his continuation is "Liber ultimus". This is probably the longest known composition from Caxton's pen.

As an author and voluminous translator, Caxton must have strongly influenced the language of his time.

Caxton's interest in the technical work of his printing press seems to have been subordinate to his interest in the literary side of the work. He has been described as a conservative man, and the fact that he was slow to adopt any of the improvements in his printing is cited as one proof. This may well have been due to his absorbing interest in the literary side of his work and his secondary interest only in his press work.

CAXTON'S PRINTING

All that is known of Caxton's methods of work and appliances used, as of all other early printers, is gained by careful painstaking study of his books. By careful measurement of the pages of books and counting the folds of a sheet it has been found that Caxton used different sizes of paper in his work, the first a sheet 22 by 15 3/4 inches used for two editions of the "Golden Legend"; possibly the larger size being used for this because of the use of the book in church; the other size being from 18 1/2 by 10 inches to 16 by 11 inches. The paper was of a coarse appearance and the sheets differed much in thickness. The variety of water marks often found in one volume and the difference in the thickness of the paper in two volumes of the same work suggest that the paper was sorted out for each volume according to its thickness, before the printer began.

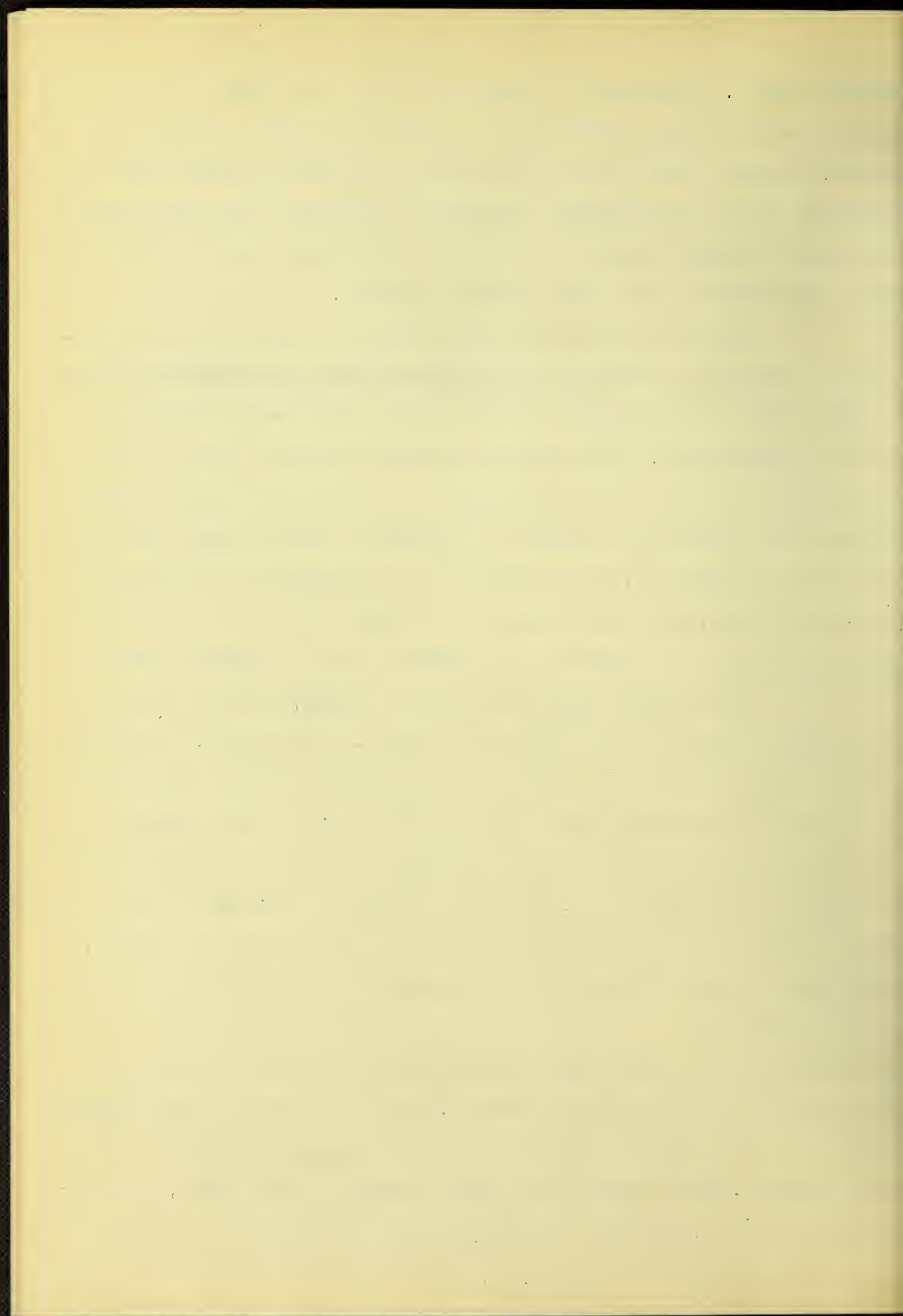


Blades gives illustrations of eight different watermarks found in the paper used by Caxton. Watermarks in paper give little evidence of value. The fact that the same watermarks are found in paper used by printers in the Low Countries indicates the source from which Caxton probably obtained his paper. But little vellum was used by Caxton's press and that was of a very inferior quality.

Caxton's books show quite a variety in the fonts of type. In some cases the change may have been made from the necessity of replacing the old type with the new and other changes to introduce a desired improvement. Duff estimates eight different fonts of type used. The manufacture of these types is a subject causing much conjecture and experiment. Nothing is positively known except that they were cast in some way, as is evident by the identity in the face of the same letter, and that the metal of which they were cast was soft enough to allow the letters to be trimmed down or slightly altered.

The greater number of Caxton's books, like the books of all other printers of the fifteenth century, are undated. A careful study of the fonts of type used in the print is one very sure way to determine an approximate date. The first type with which Caxton has any connection is the one used in Mansion's office at Bruges for the printing of the "Recuyell". This type is said to resemble closely the manuscript work of Colard Mansion and was used only in his office. With some letters changed it was also used for the printing of three books in French.

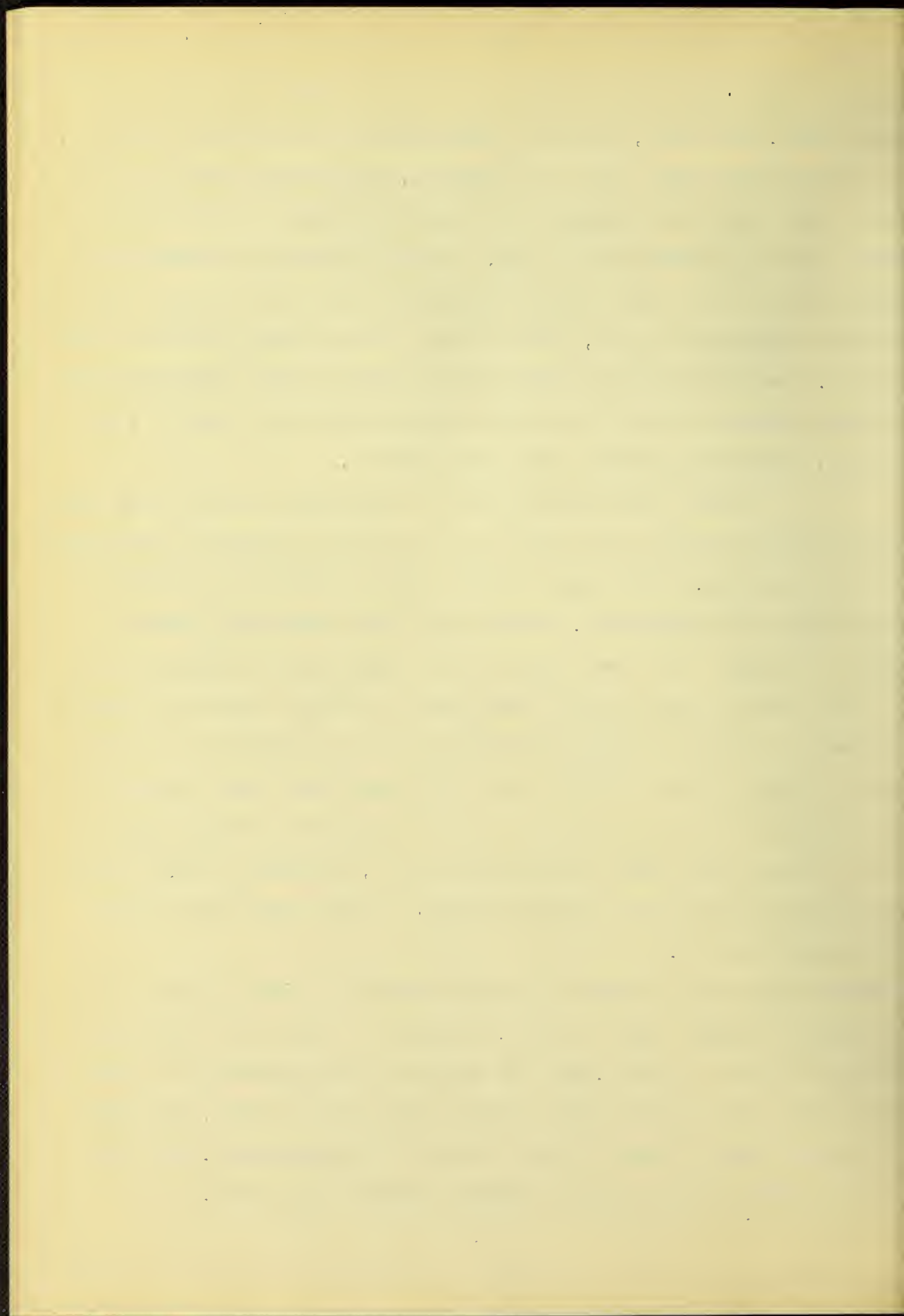
When Caxton set up his press at Westminster he used a new font of type which is known as type number 2. This type bears a close resemblance to type number 1 but is more elaborate, especially the capital letters. Some twenty books were printed in this type, when apparently it was considered too much worn for further use and the



least worn letters were selected for use as punches in casting the next font. This type, which for convenience will be called number 3, is of a thinner face and less elaborate, which shows that type number 2 must have been trimmed up if used as punches in the casting of this type. A fourth font of type, the small letters of which are an exact copy of the type of Fust and Shoeffler and the capitals like the Flemish "Secretary type", was used only for headings and some Latin books. The most striking points of difference in the remaining four fonts used are the use of woodcut initials with type number 5, and large, Lombardic capitals with type number 7.

A most interesting point in connection not only with Caxton's books but with the work of all the early printers is the punctuation employed. There seems to have been no knowledge whatever of principles of punctuation. Caxton used three different points: a long or short for the comma, for the colon one dot above another as the present colon and for the period an almost square dot usually placed at the top of the word instead of at the bottom as now used. All of these points are scattered indiscriminately over the page and sometimes combined in a group as if for decoration. Caxton began to use the paragraph mark sometime about 1481, apparently using it to show the beginning of a sentence where it takes the place of the elaborate capital.

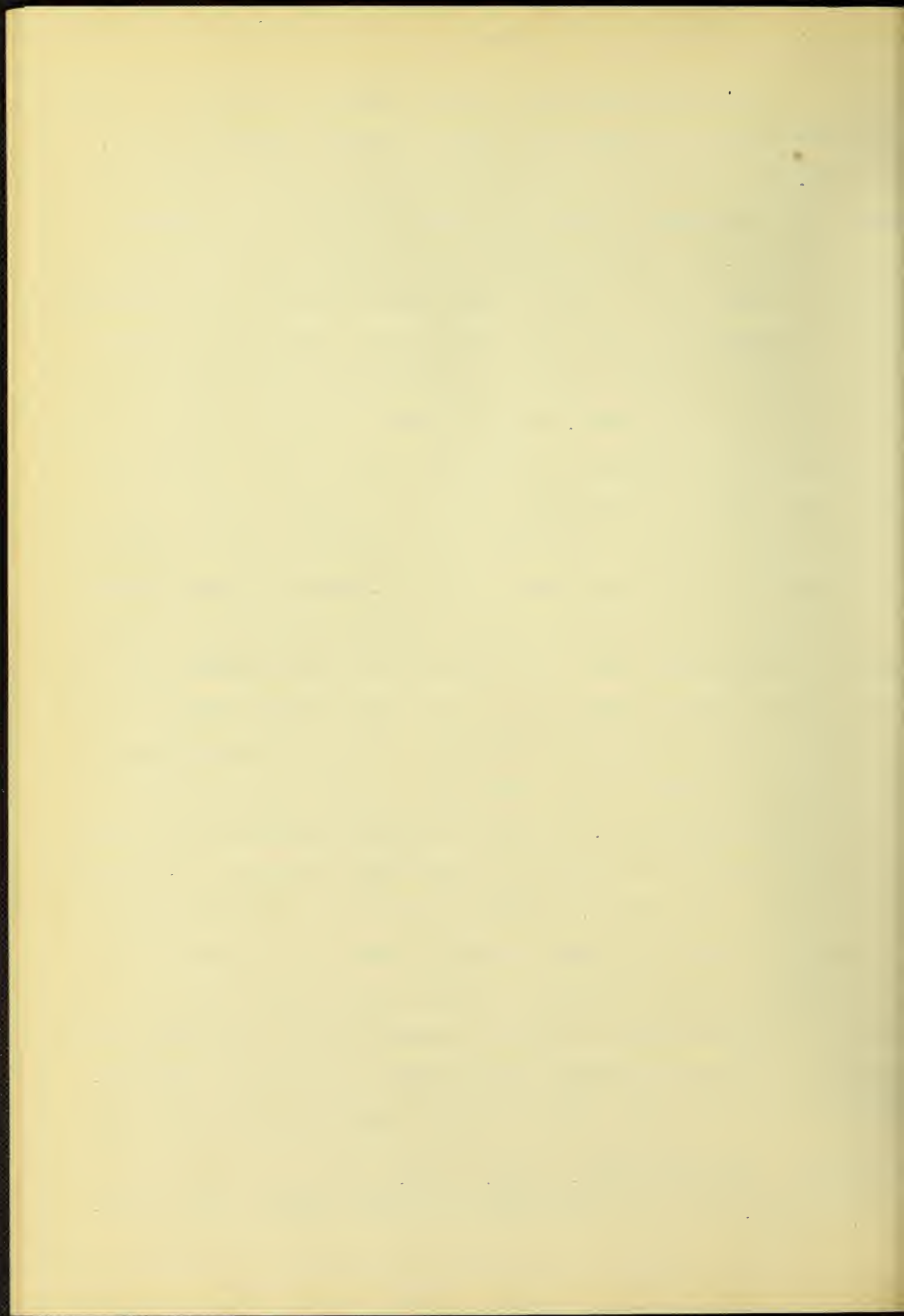
Caxton began using woodcut illustrations in the third edition of his "Parvus et Magnus Cato" in 1481. A number of books from that date on contain woodcut designs. For the most part these designs are rude in execution and sometimes used without regard to the text. Wood-cut initials seem to have followed the use of illustrations. They are first found in the "Fables of Aesop" printed about 1484.



The most interesting woodcut employed by Caxton is perhaps his large device or trade mark found in Roberts' *Printers' marks*, page 55. The first book in which this design is known to have been used is a Sarum Missal printed for Caxton in 1487 by W. Maynyal, a Paris printer. When Caxton received the printed sheets he placed his device or trade mark on the last page which happened to be blank. Only the last twelve books from his press bear the device and no other mark was used by Caxton. Various suggestions have been offered as to the meaning of this device. There has been no question about the W.C. being Caxton's initials. The interlacing marks between the letters have been variously interpreted. They are supposed to be a 7 and 4 interlaced and to mean an important date in Caxton's life or that they may read 74 or 47 and may refer to his age. The most probable solution is that they do not represent Arabic figures but are only a combination of conventional forms. In confirmation of this Blades says that "Mr Adin Williams of Kempsford, in the course of some antiquarian researches, took a rubbing of a monumental brass in Stanton Church, Hertz, and was struck by the resemblance which a part of it bore to Caxton's well-known mark. The brass is in bad condition but is easily deciphered, and it is in memory of John Felde, alderman of London, who like Caxton, was a mercer... If the top pennant of Felde's mark were cut away, and the loop added, we should have a close resemblance to the so-called figures in Caxton's device. That Felde's mark is a combination of conventional forms then commonly used by merchants is undeniable, and Caxton's device is doubtless of a similar character. It is his personal seal, and the central part is probably the very

Roberts. *Printers' marks*. 1893. p. 55.

Blades. *Biography and typography of William Caxton*. Ed. 2. 1882. p. 138-39.

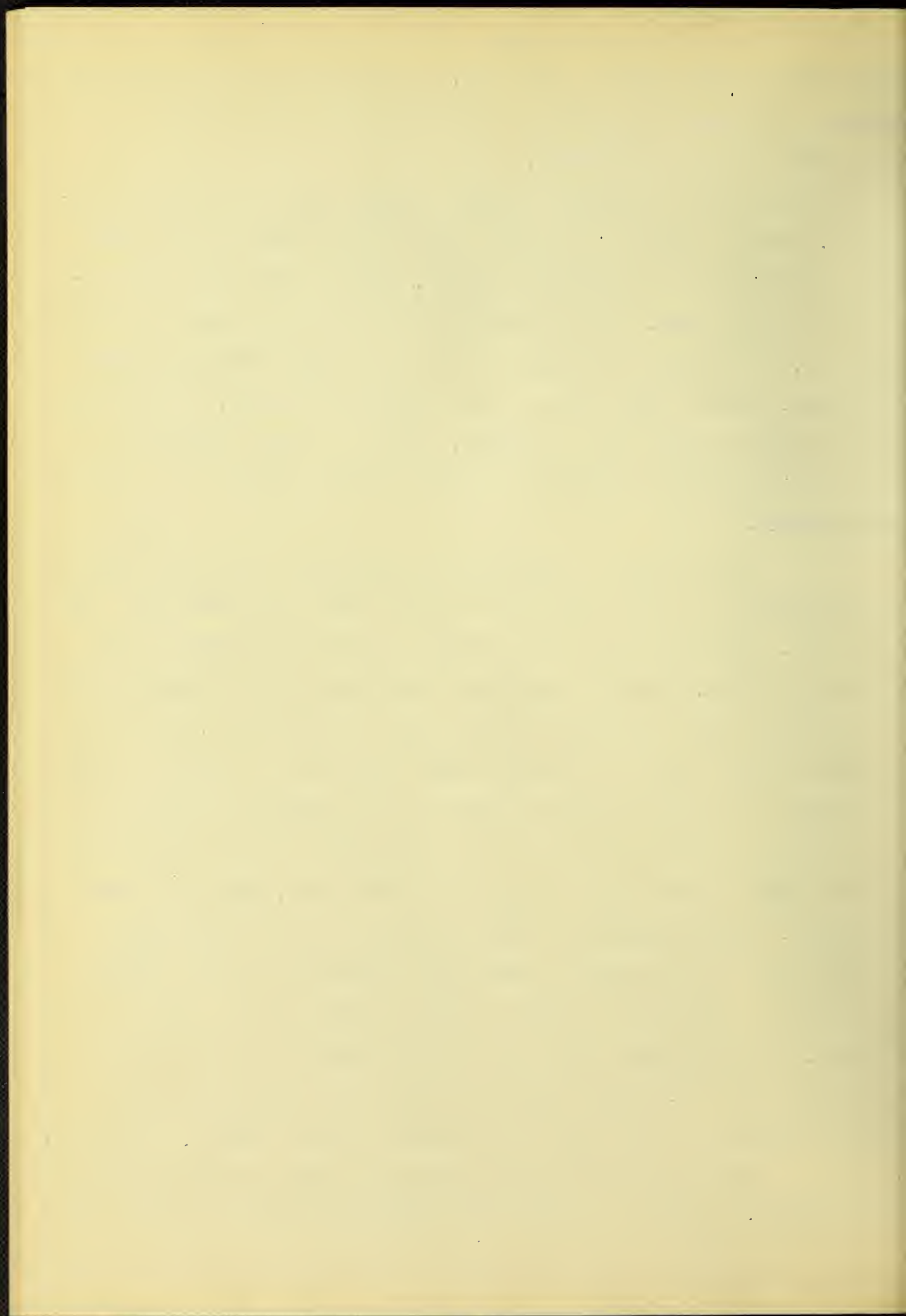


same mark as that used by him when, as the Governor of the English Nation, he stamped every bale of British goods which entered or issued from the city of Bruges".

In the surrounding ornamental border a Roman S and C are quite prominent. Without regard to the fact that neither Caxton nor his English contemporaries used Roman letters, these letters have been variously interpreted. One suggestion is that they may stand for Sancta Cologna, a reference to Cologne as the place where Caxton learned printing. Another that they may mean Staples of Calais, a great wool mart of which Caxton was a merchant, and yet a third suggestion is for Sigillum Caxtoni referring to his signature placed on all imports and exports.

In this day of steam printing presses it would be intensely interesting to know something definite about the press that Caxton used. Unfortunately nothing remains of the appliances of his printing office. Some old engravings discovered in the Bagford collection show that the early printers used a press very much like the present letter press. An ordinary main screw with a bar for a lever furnished the desired pressure which in all probability was not a very heavy pressure as the ink was so thin that it would squeeze out at the edges of the type and cause a blurred page, under too heavy pressure. An examination of some of Caxton's early books shows a point hole in each corner of the page indicating that one page was printed at a time and was held in place on the type by a pin at each corner. Later two pins only were used and finally the practice was entirely given up. After a time two pages were printed at once, a good evidence of this being corresponding crooked lines on two pages.

In the early books from Caxton's press the signatures used to enable the binder to collect the sheets were written at the ex-



treme bottom of the page. Later they were printed. Only four sheets were used in a section, so the collating of Caxton's books was not a difficult matter. Catch words were never used by Caxton. Single words are often found at the bottom of the page but in each case they are an integral part of the text. Parchment served as the binding of many of Caxton's books. The edges were folded down and a blank leaf pasted in as a lining. If a more durable binding was wanted, sometimes thin boards of oak or beech were used and sometimes leaves of waste paper pasted together to form the stiff covers. These were covered with a brown sheep-skin upon which geometric figures were often traced.

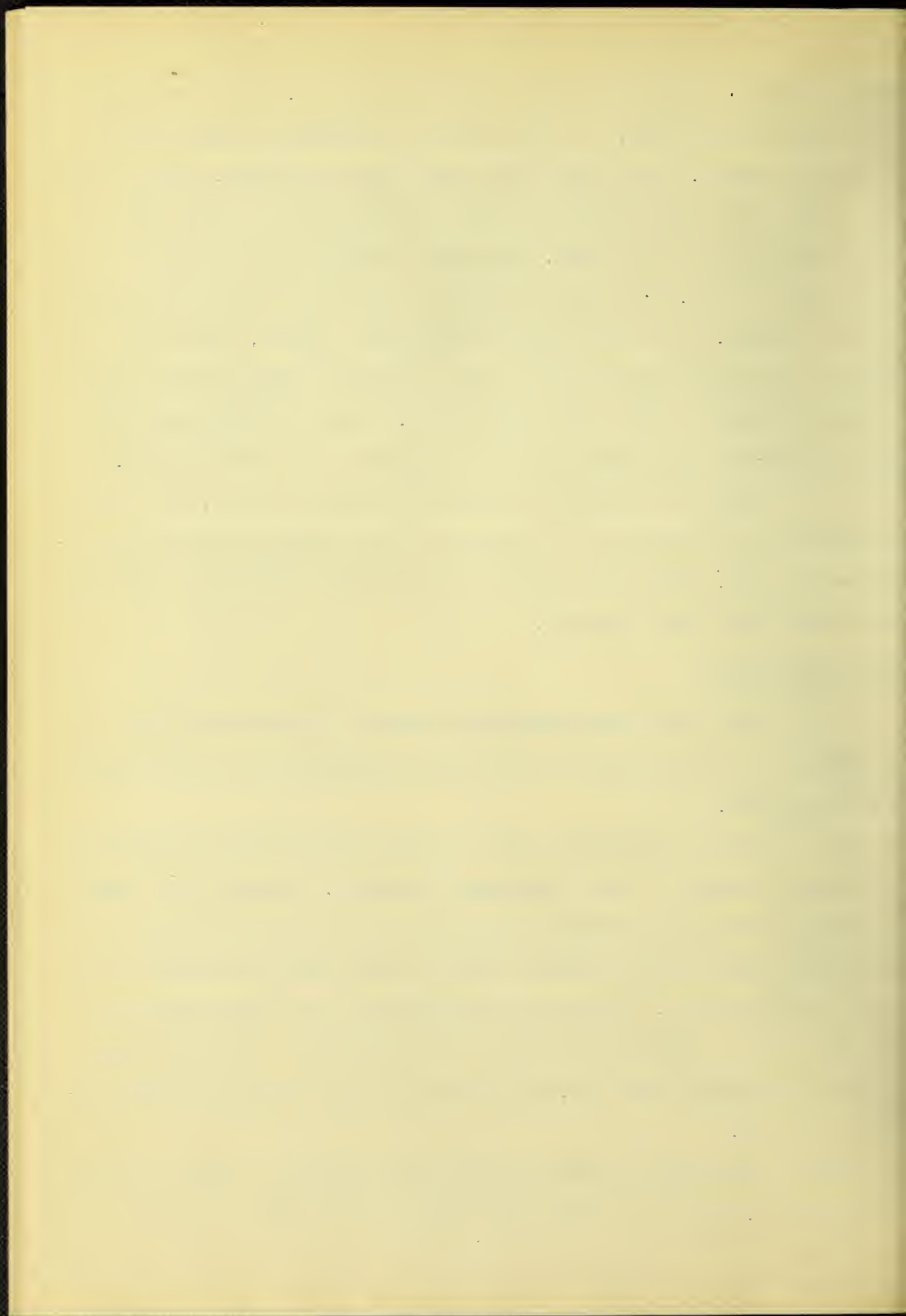
Before the woodcut initials were used in 1484, the initial letters at the beginning of chapters and the paragraph marks were inserted by hand. These were usually put in with a vermilion ink though sometimes light blue was used.

THE OXFORD PRESS

After the consideration of Caxton as England's first printer it is interesting to note his contemporaries and his immediate successors.

A close claimant to Caxton's honor as the first English printer was an unknown printer at the University of Oxford. A Latin book 'Expositio Sancti Jeronimi in Simbolum Apostolorum by Tyrannius Rufinus of Aquileia' states in the colophon that it was printed in Oxford 'anno domini MCCCCLXVIIJ'. Writers have written for and against this date; but the general conclusion has come to be that this date is a misprint, one X being left out. The corrected date should read 1478 instead of 1468.

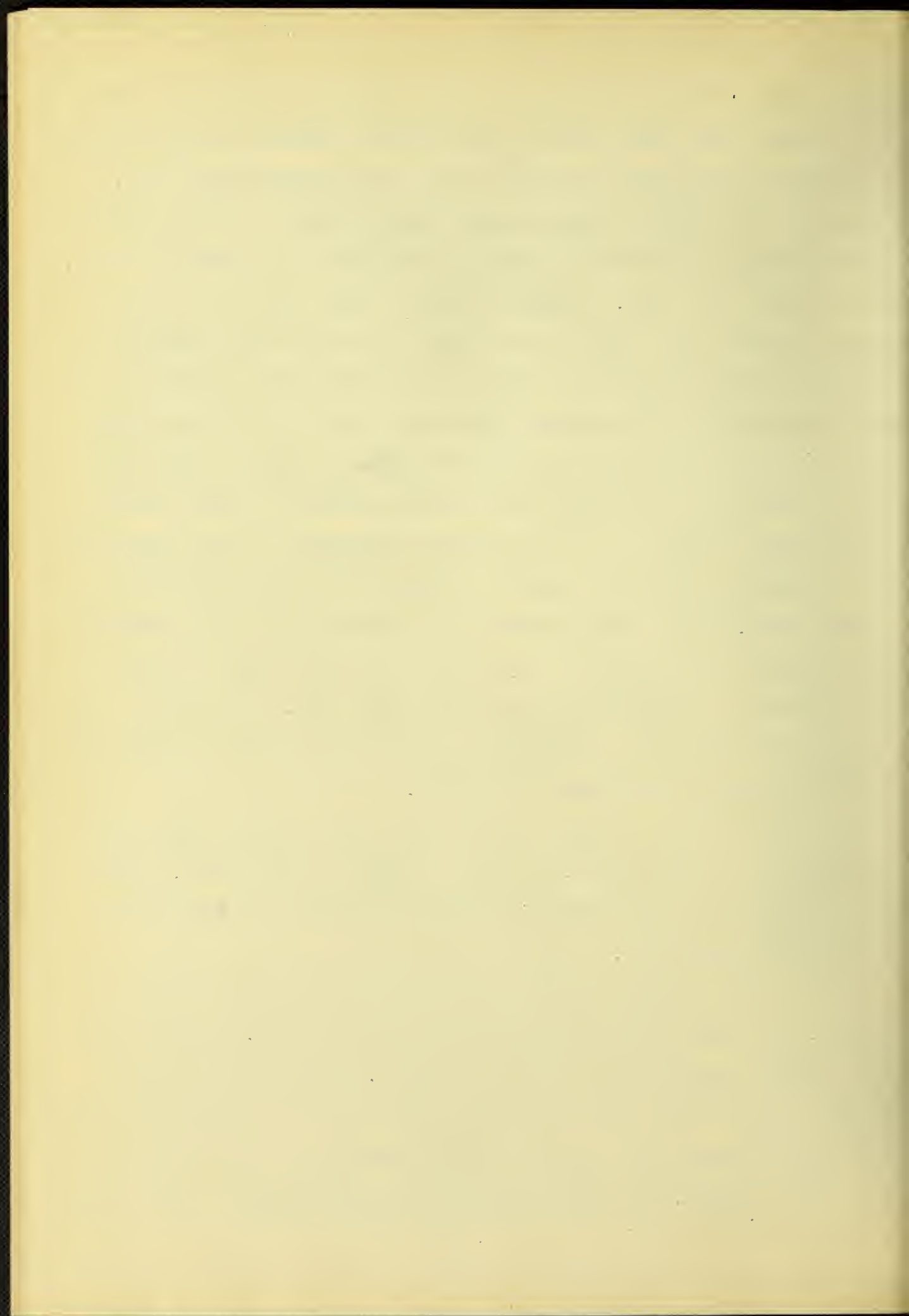
A careful comparison of the typographical features of this book with others of a known later date shows that the date 1487 is in all prob-



ability the correct one. Among the sure indications that this book was printed later than 1468 are the printed signatures which are not known to have appeared in any book of an earlier date than 1472. Copies of this book are known bound in the original binding with books printed in 1487 and one copy is known now in a modern binding, bound with a 1479 book. A set-off from the damp ink of the second volume upon the last leaf of the first volume shows that they must originally have been bound together. These books are printed in the same type and it is not likely that after printing was once introduced at Oxford the press was allowed to remain idle for some ten years. The type in which the 1478 book is printed probably was obtained from Cologne as it very strongly resembles the type used there at the time. The lines are uneven in length and some letters are wrongly used. In two books printed later these faults are corrected but the name of the printer is not given until the name of Theodoric Rood appears in the colophon of a book dated 1481. A new Gothic type is used for this book, evidently in two fonts the larger type being used for headlines and chapter headings.

A book issued some four years later shows still another type much more English in appearance. From the colophon of this book it has been learned that Thomas Hunt an English stationer at Oxford was taken into partnership.

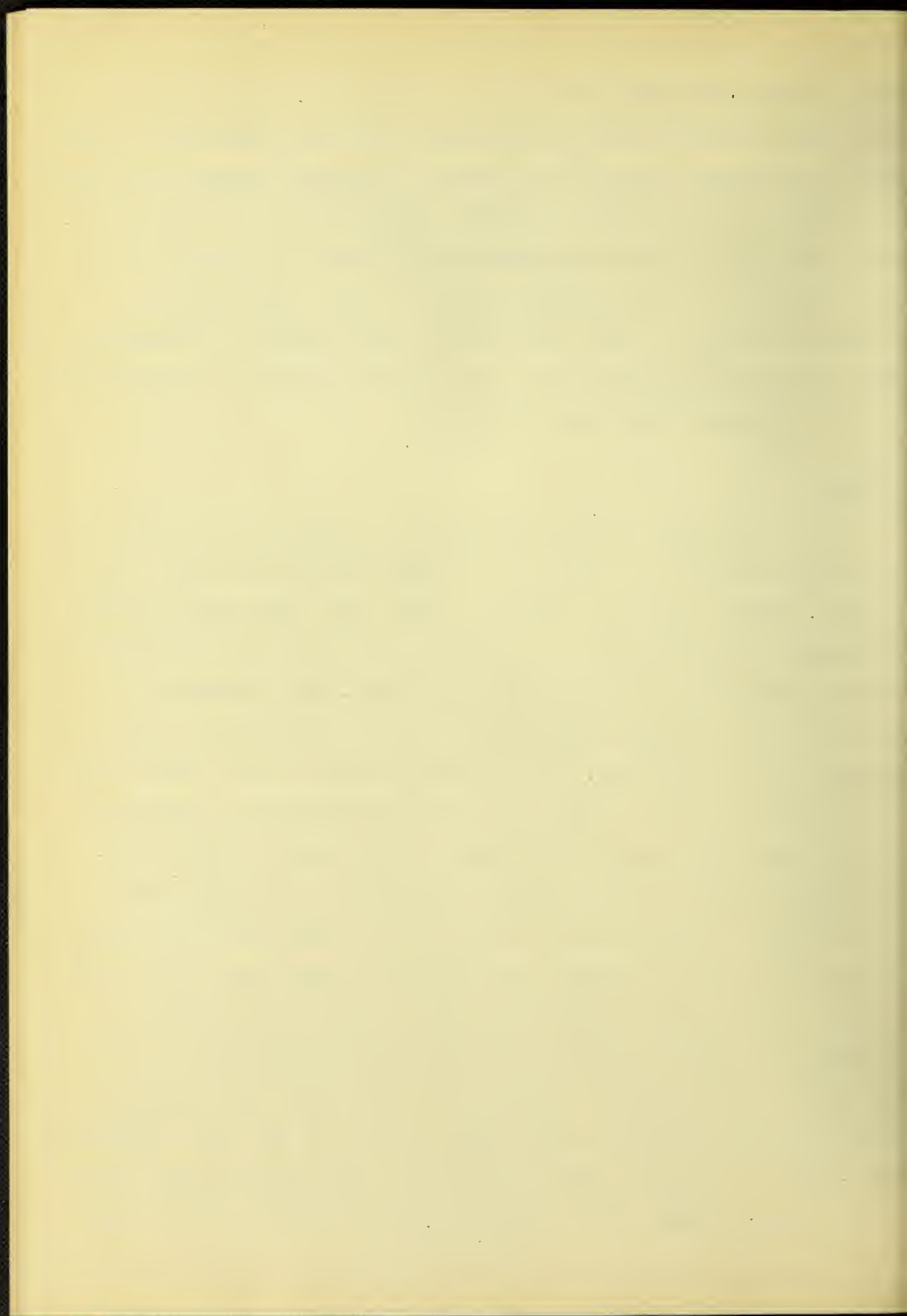
Very little is known of the men who did the printing at Oxford. The press was in operation from 1478 to 1486. The last book was a "Liber Festialis", a book of sermons. This contains eleven large cuts and five small ones. The large cuts are trimmed off at the end as if intended for a larger volume possibly a folio edition of the Golden Legend. This book contains no printer's name and no other



book is known from this press during the century. Only fifteen books are known from this press for the eight years it is supposed to have been in operation. Among these fifteen is classed a Cicero pro Milene, the first classic printed in England and known only by a few leaves. The work of this press was probably done almost if not entirely to meet the needs of the University and so we find that although so closely connected in date with Caxton's establishment at Westminster there was no connection in the work done and one press does not seem to have influenced the other in any way.

LETTOU

The most important of Caxton's contemporary printers was John Lettou who was the first to introduce printing into the city of London. Lettou started his press in 1480, three years after Caxton's settlement at Westminster, by publishing an edition of John Kendale's Indulgences asking for aid against the Turks. This appeared in a small neat type contrasting strangely with an edition just issued by Caxton in his large type. It is quite possible that the improved appearance of the work in small type influenced Caxton to change his font of type for shortly after this he first used his small type. Nothing is known of Lettou except his work in London. The books issued from his press show an excellence of workmanship that indicates experience in printing. He divided his pages into two columns, used signatures and an even type. These points and a workmanship superior to anything before appearing in England show that he was a foreign printer. Lettou's type was like that used by a printer at Naples, Matthias Moravus, except the capitals. He may have learned his art here or he may only have obtained his type from the same source. During the two years after starting his press Lettou printed about

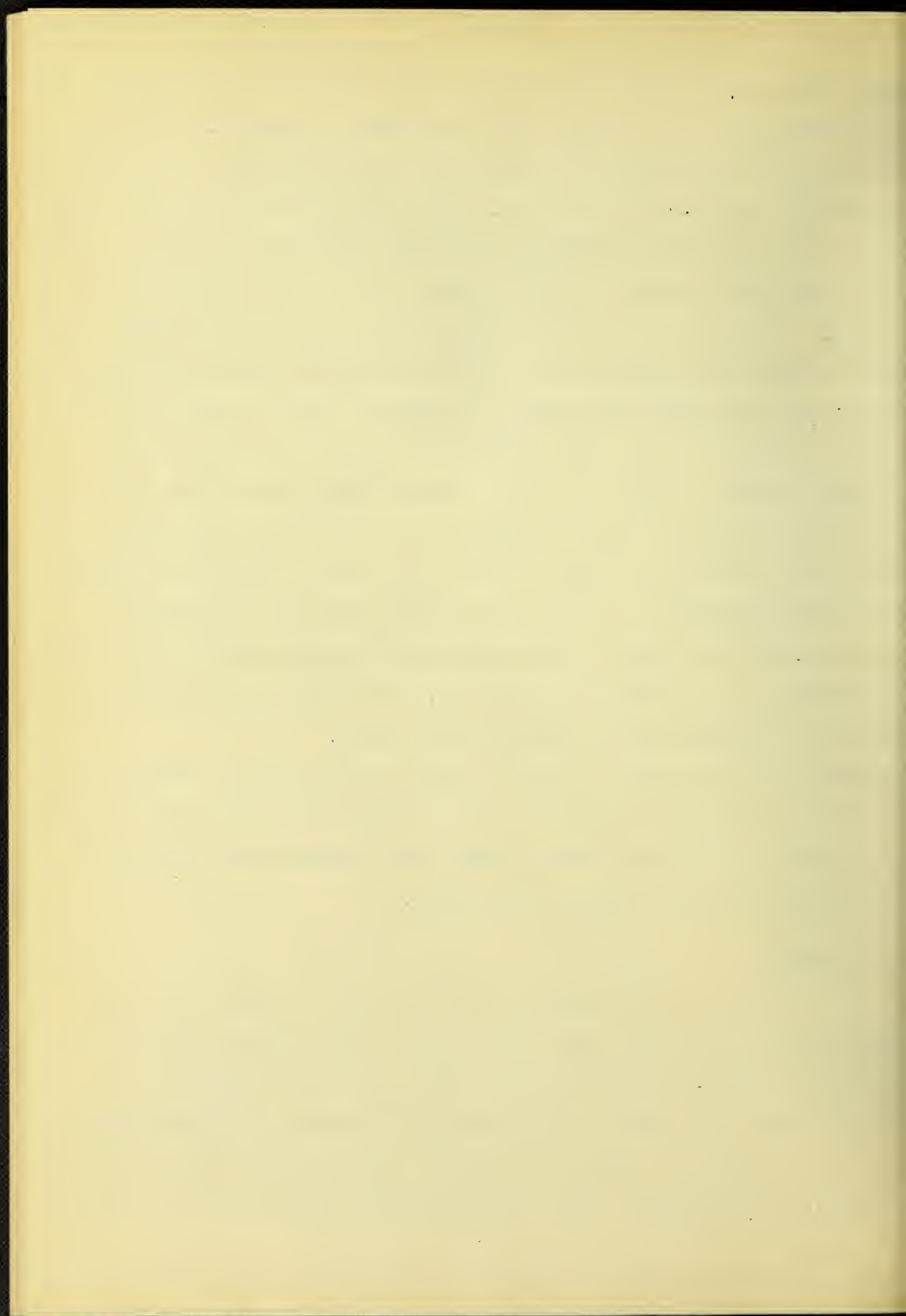


six books. At the end of this time he was joined by a William de Machlinia, possibly from the town of Malines in Belgium. A new type was now used, more English in style and the publication of law books became the sole work of the firm. After the publication of five books and some time between 1483 and 1484 Lettou disappeared from the firm. It is not known whether he died or left the country. Machlinia continued the work alone. The character of the press changed under the new management as Machlinia was not so skilled a workman as Lettou. He issued some twenty two books or editions, none of them dated and only four bear his name. Two addresses are given; the 'By Flete-brigge' probably being the earlier one and 'In Holbeni' the later one. It is not known how long he continued to print: The latest date to which his work can be traced is 1486, the date of the Bull of Innocence VIII relating to the marriage of King Henry VII, which he printed. One book bears a title page which suggests that he must have continued to print until 1491 or 1492, as no title page has been found in England used at a known earlier date.

Eleven different sets of type were used in this office. One set of capitals possibly belonging to a set of Roman type and a set of large type used but a little that may have been obtained from Caxton are all that are of any interest to mention.

ST ALBANS

It is quite possible that the least is known about the only press of Caxton's time which may have had a direct connection with his office. Some time in the latter part of 1479 or early in 1480 a press was started at St Albans. The printer was later referred to in a colophon of Wynkyn de Worde as "Sometime schoolmaster of St Albans. There are only eight books known from this press. The first

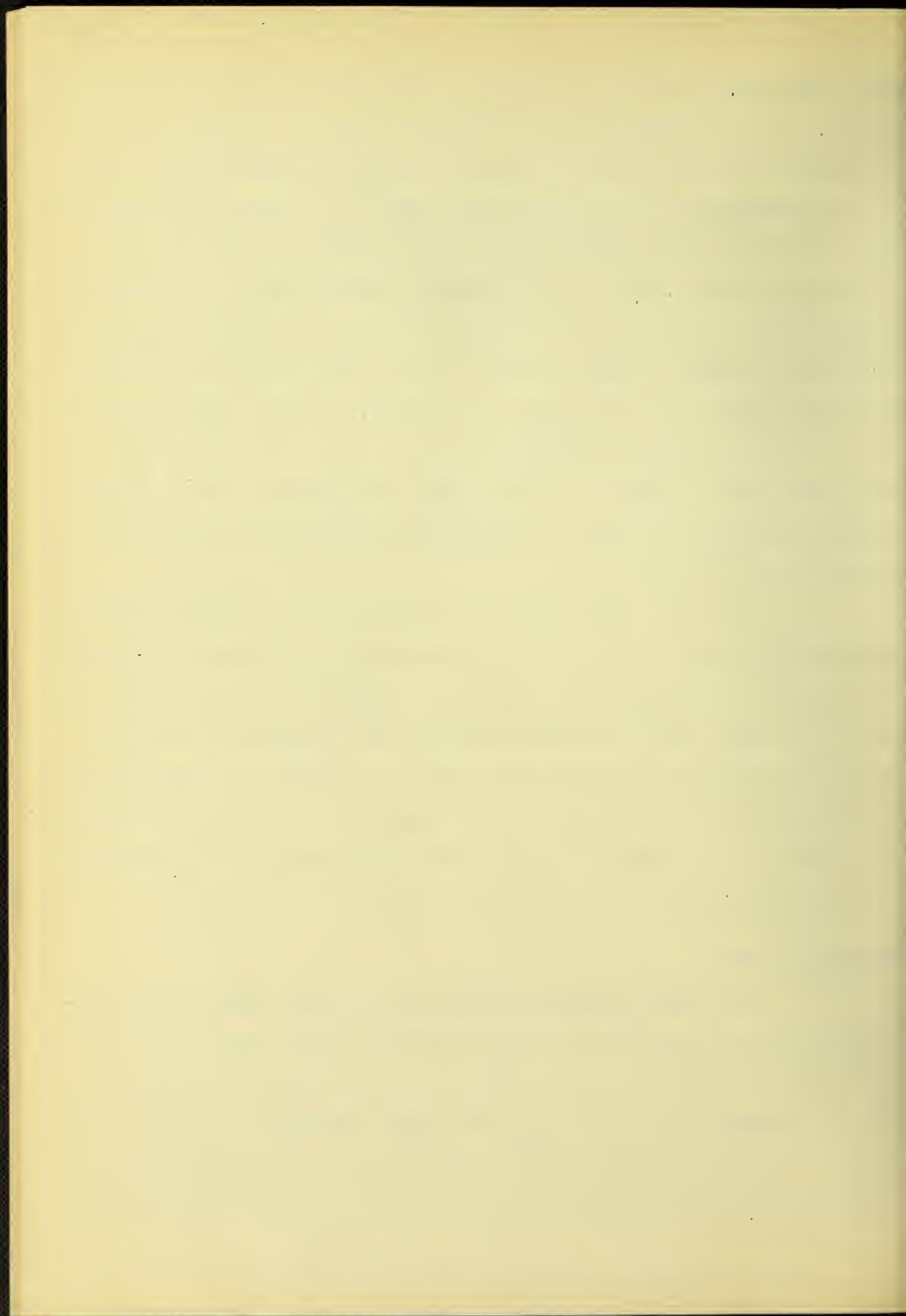


six books were entirely scholastic in character but the last two were popular books. The Chronicles of England is not of especial interest. The last one, a treatise on hunting, hawking and coat armor, commonly known as the Book of St Albans dated 1468 is of interest. No perfect copy of the book now exists, which may be taken as evidence of its extreme popularity. It is the earliest English book known which contains samples of printing in colors. The coats of arms are in most instances printed in their correct colors. The initial letters and paragraph marks are printed in red and blue. Caxton's type number 3 which he did not use after 1484, is used in this book and in the Chronicles. This suggests a close connection between the two printing presses although nothing is known of any communication between Westminster and St Albans.

From this brief survey of the printing in England during the time that Caxton was at work at Westminster we see that no press was doing as extensive and as important a work. The printers at Oxford, in London and at St Albans seem to have occupied themselves with the printing of material translated and edited by others while Caxton was almost entirely his own translator and editor. The mechanical work of the press also quite exclusively occupied the attention of the immediate followers of Caxton's time.

WYNKYN DE WORDE

The most important work of the closing years of the fifteenth century was probably that of Wynkyn de Worde Caxton's pupil and immediate successor. Very little is known of de Worde's life. As he succeeded to Caxton's materials and continued printing at his house in Westminster it is very certain that he had been the chief assistant at Caxton's press and as he was still alive in 1534, fifty-



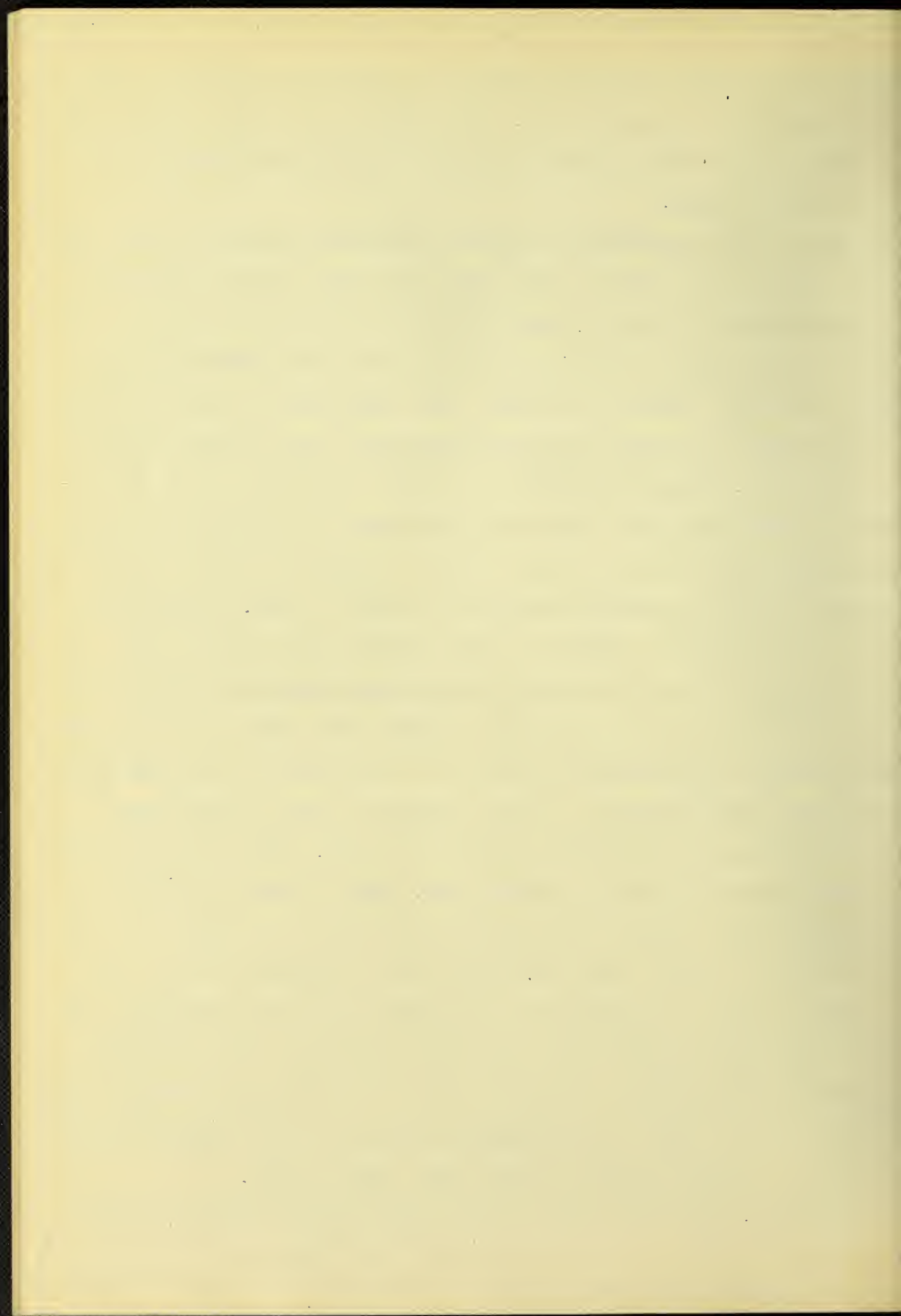
eight years after the death of Caxton, he must have begun the work at Westminster at an early age. Duff thinks it possible that he came to England with Caxton when he returned from the Low Countries with his printing press.

Though de Worde succeeded to Caxton's printing materials in 1491 his name did not appear until 1493. Five books were printed before this in which Caxton's type was used, with the addition of a set of wood cut initials which it is supposed he obtained from Godfried van Os.

The first book issued by de Worde, 'The chastysing of God's children' is the first book issued from the Westminster press which contained a title page. Wynkyn de Worde's promptness in adopting this improvement in the form of his book is one evidence of his interest in the mechanical work of the printing office. Although he issued several hundred books he neither translated or edited a book. He seems to have had very little interest in the literary part of the work.

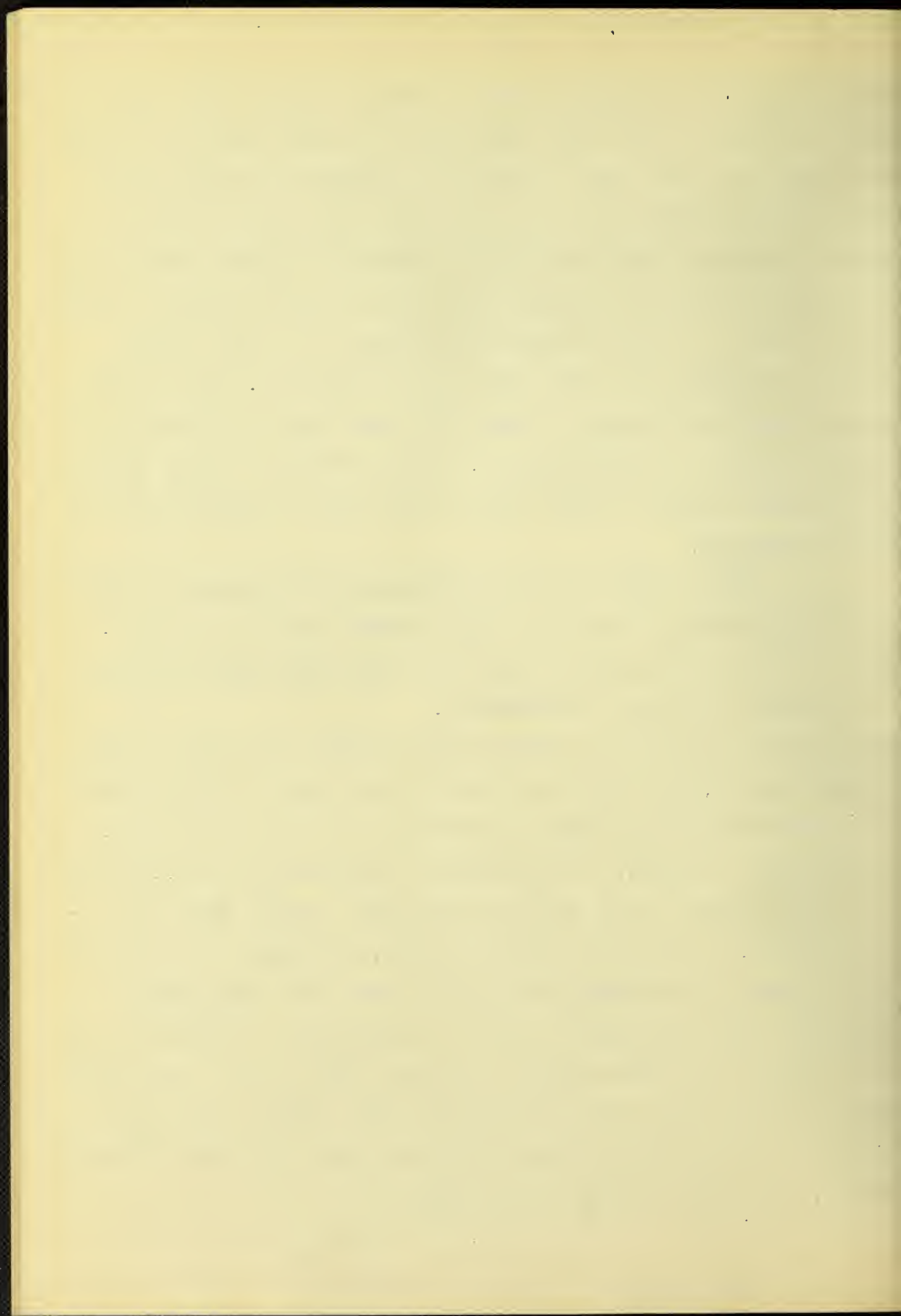
It is also possible that he did not have the necessary learning for the work of translator and editor. He must have been one of the most enterprising and successful printers of the time for fully 700 books are known from his press. To have printed so many he must have found a ready and profitable sale for his work. About 110 books are placed between the years 1490 and 1500. Many of these are known by fragments only, hence it is possible that the actual number of printed books was larger. Some time about 1496 the demand for his books probably became so great that he was unable to print sufficient numbers and other printers were employed to print for him. A London printer, Julian Notary, printed a book for de Worde in 1497 and the following year moved to Westminster, possibly at the request of de Worde who wished another printing press near at hand.

In 1500 de Worde moved from Caxton's house to Fleet Street, London



almost opposite the printing house of Richard Pynson. This placed him near the centre of the London trade and in a better position to compete with Pynson who came to London from Normandy some time about 1490 to succeed Machilina in the printing of law books. Some time before 1490 Pynson began printing and though he did not print as many books as de Worde his workmanship was superior and he issued a better class of books. In 1496 an edition of Terence, the first classic printed in England was issued from his press. Entries in the state papers after the accession of Henry VIII show Pynson in receipt of an annuity probably as king's printer. In this office he printed Henry's books against Luther. In 1509 Pynson used a font of Roman type, the first in England.

When de Worde moved from Westminster he disposed of most of his type which was possibly largely melted down for recasting. Some of the old wood cuts of Caxton were after this used by Notary who continued to print in Westminster. While printing in Caxton's house de Worde issued such books as the 'Golden Legend', the 'Speculum Vitae Christi' and the 'Vitas Patrum', the translation of which Caxton finished on the day of his death. After moving to London, his publications became more popular. He issued small service books, religious treatises, school books and popular stories. An assistant, Robert Copland, is thought to be responsible for many of the French translations issued from this press. Wynkyn de Worde continued to print in London until his death in 1534. In all about 710 books are known from his press, by far the largest number printed by any one printer before 1600. During part of the time he had two printing offices in London, one at the Sun in Fleete Street, the other in Paul's church yard.



FOREIGN PRINTERS

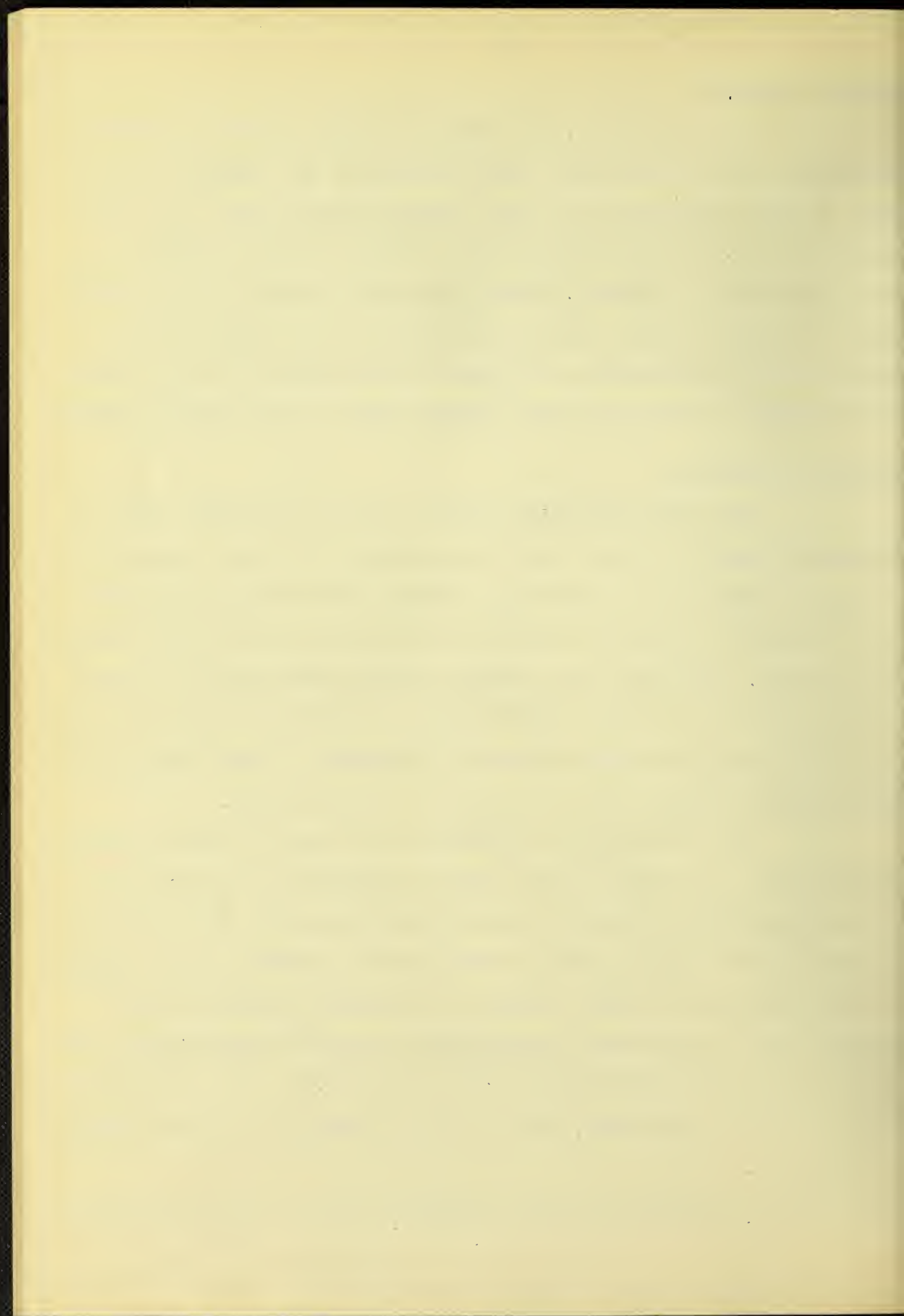
As we have seen, the number of books printed in England increased rapidly during the last few years of the century but for a year or more immediately following Caxton's death there was little printing done. This was the time when foreign printers helped to supply the demand for books. These were mostly service books. Gerard Leeu of Antwerp printed six popular books for the English trade, among them the Chronicles of England and the History of Jason. This was probably the most important printing done by any foreign printers

SPREAD OF PRINTING

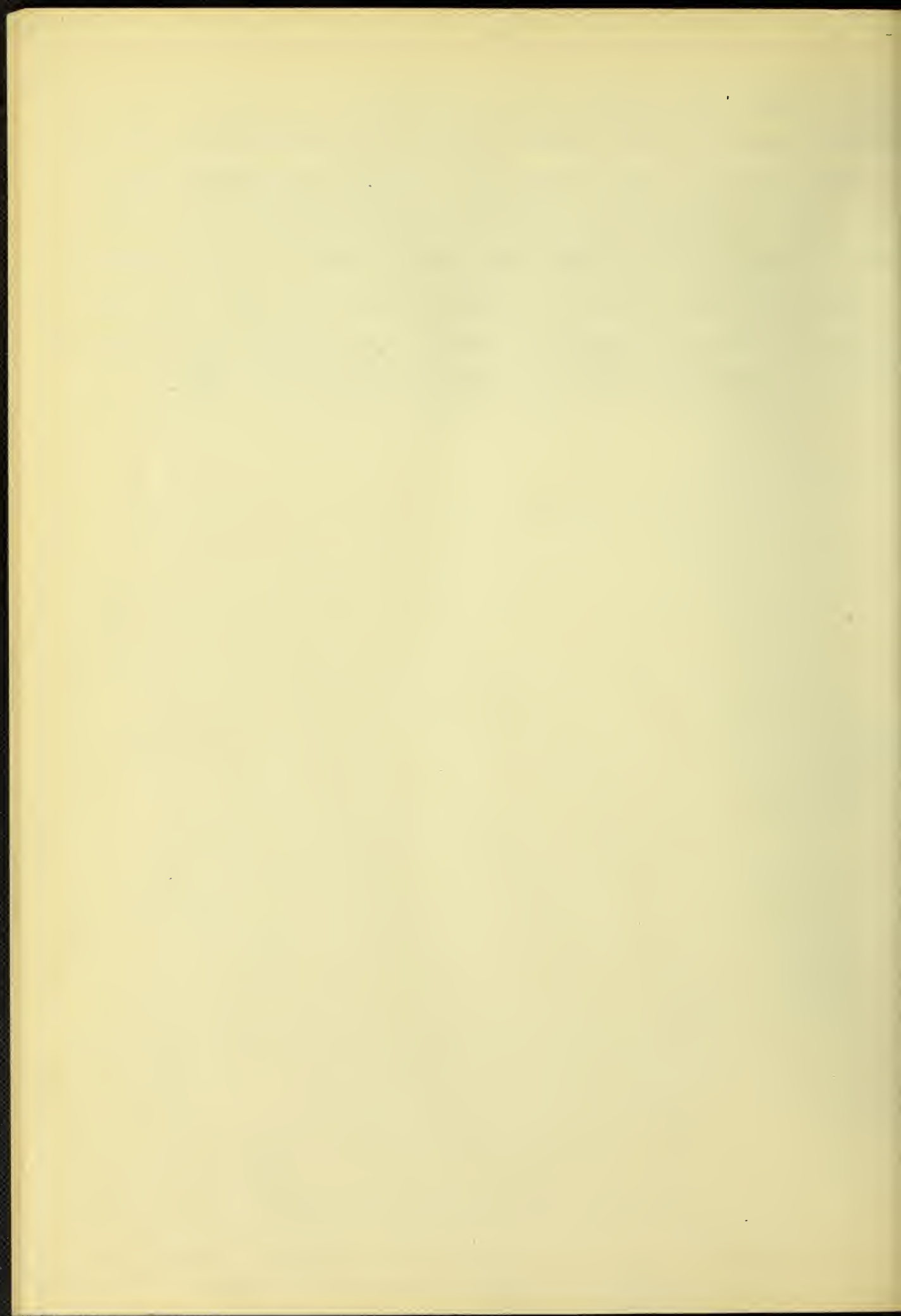
After the year 1500 printing presses in England began to increase rapidly in numbers and the individual printers consequently became of less special importance. Printers from foreign countries came bringing with them a knowledge of the art in its various stages of progress. Thus those who succeeded Caxton were brought in competition with those who had been trained in the work and were familiar with the best devices and methods of workmanship. Under these influences English printing soon improved in its appearance.

While Koberger was building up his great printing concern in Nuremberg and issuing costly and rich editions of religious and theological works, Caxton was issuing from his small press at Westminster service books, romances and histories printed in the language of the people and for the people. In workmanship Caxton's books appear rude and unartistic in comparison with the typographical work done by the master printers of other countries. The only illustrations used were a few wood-cuts, not so poor in design but of the rudest workmanship.

With the good judgment and keen foresight born of a long and success-



ful business career Caxton saw the condition of the country and the demand for books in the English language to be read by the people as a whole and not by the wealthy class alone. He adapted the work of his press to the existing conditions and was rewarded with success. Caxton must also be accorded the laudable desire to place a means of gaining knowledge as well as pleasing within the reach of the many and as the bearer to England's shores of the greatest gift of his age his memory should be cherished and honored in all the land.



READING LIST ON THE EARLY ENGLISH PRESS, 1477-1500.

Blades, William.

(The) biography and typography of William Caxton, England's first printer. Ed. 2. 387p. illus. Lond. 1882.

Trubner. 1.25

The chief authority on the life and works of Caxton.

Well illustrated.

Duff, E. Gordon.

Caxton, Wynkyn de Worde, Julian Notary, Oxford and St Albans, and London. (see Duff, E. G. Early printed books. 1893. p. 125-173.)

A short account of the first English printers and the introduction of printing into England. Very little theory, largely facts and up-to-date.

Humphreys, Henry Noel.

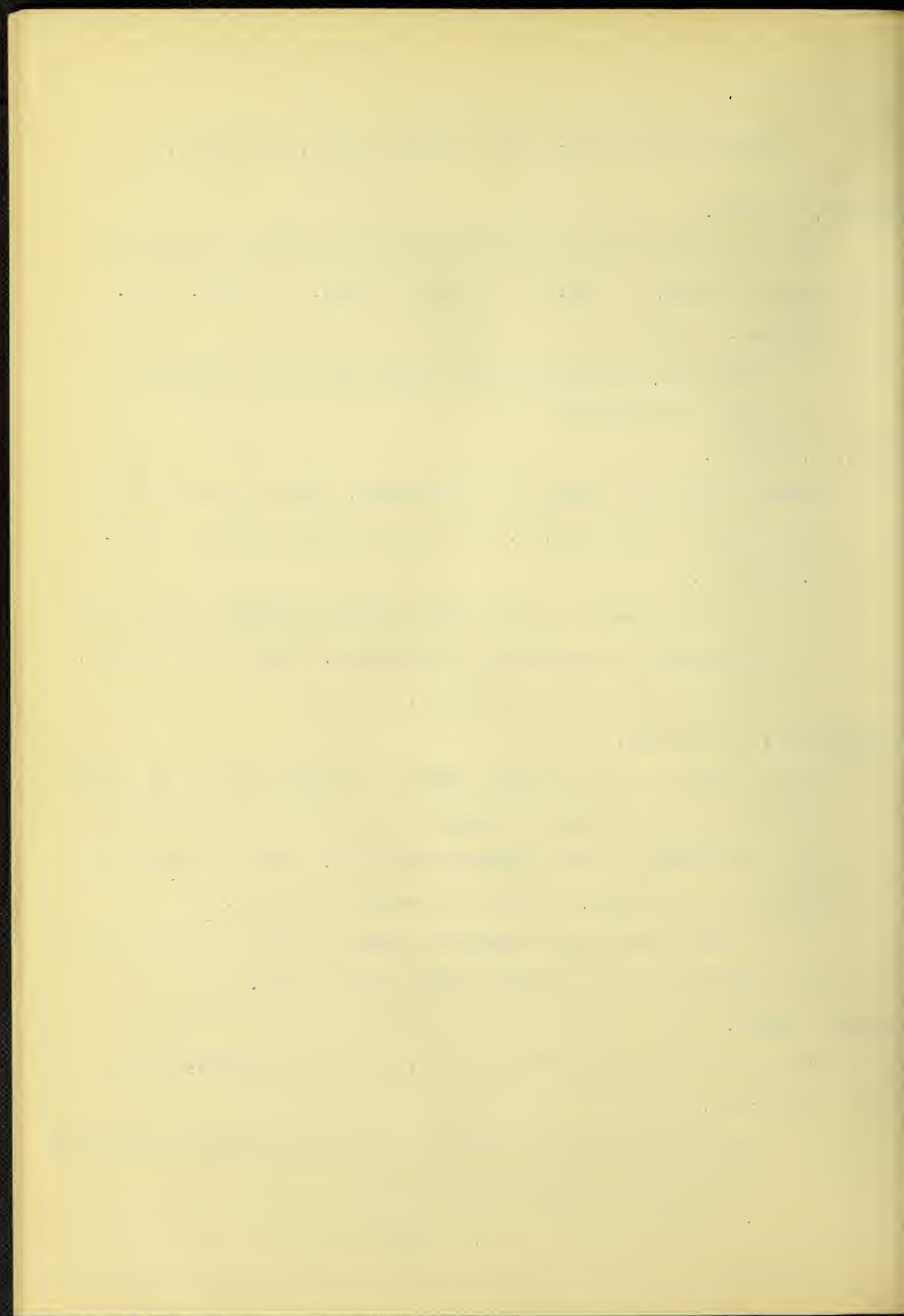
(The) advent of the printing press in England and the progress of the art of printing in England, after the time of Caxton, till the middle of the sixteenth century. (see his History of the art of printing... 1868. p.154-169 & 184-205.)

A brief but quite complete account of the life and work of Caxton and the printers that followed him.

Morley, Henry.

William Caxton. (see Morley Henry. English writers. 1890. 6:293-339.)

The leading events of Caxton's life with special reference to his printing and literary work.



Putnam, George Haven.

William Caxton and the introduction of printing into England, 1412-1492. (see Putnam, G: H. Books and their makers during the Middle Ages... 1899. 2:101-148.)

A general sketch briefly giving the leading points in the career and work of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde. Also a brief account of the Oxford and later English presses.

Roberts, William.

(The) printer's mark in England. (see his Printers' marks. 1893 p. 52-99.)

Illustrations and descriptions of the marks used by early English printers.

Spofford, A. R. & others, ed.

William Caxton. (see Library of historic characters and famous events. 1899. 5: 391-400.)

A brief, popular biographical sketch and a description of some of his books.

Stephen, Leslie, ed.

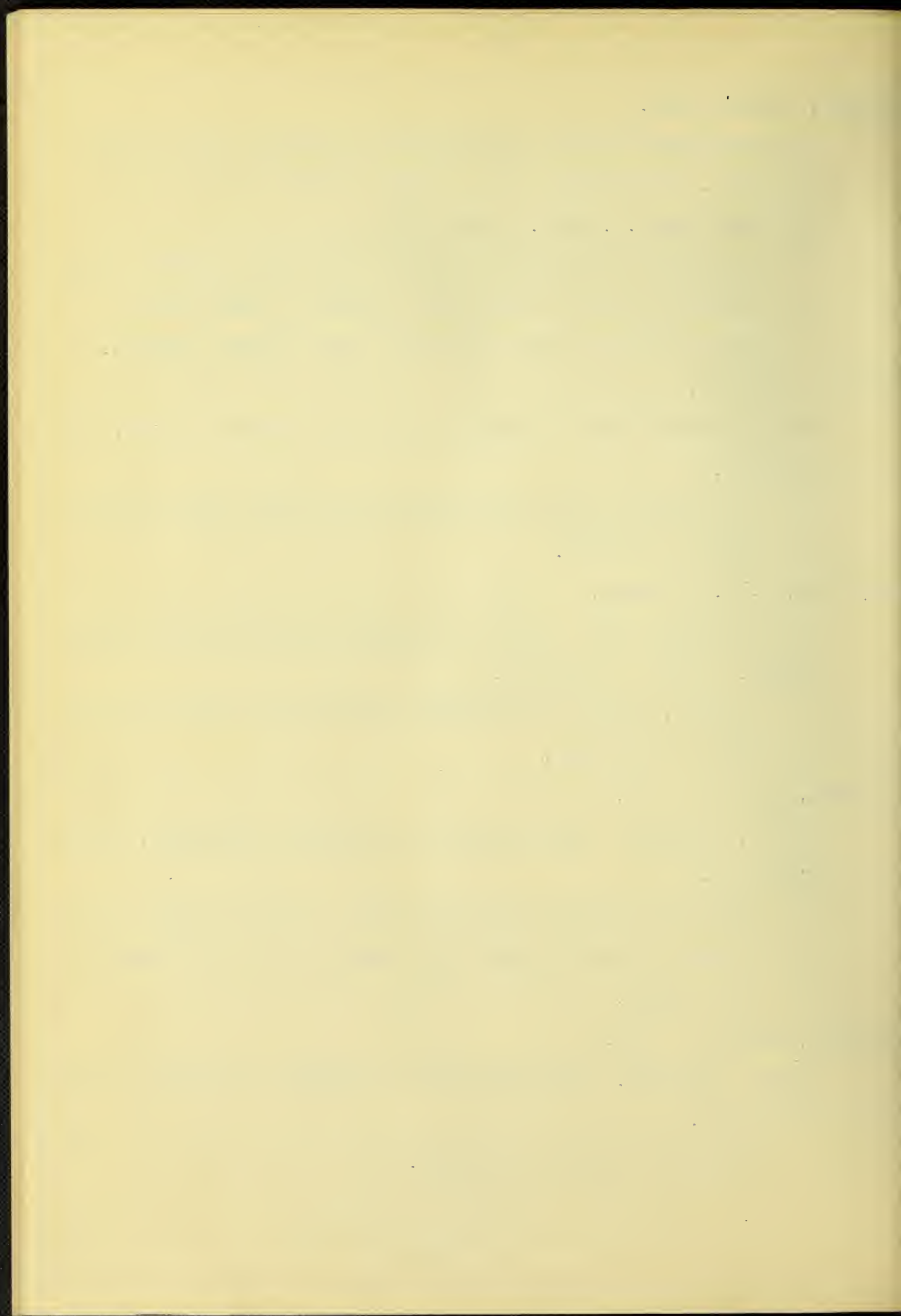
Caxton, William. (see Dictionary of national biography. 1887. 9:381-389.)

Detailed account of Caxton's life. A list of books printed by him. A list of works about Caxton with brief comment on their value.

Stephen, Leslie, ed.

Worde, Wynkyn de. (see Dictionary of national biography. 1900. 62:443-445.)

Brief but detailed biography.



BOOKS ANALYZED

Duff, E. Gordon.

Early printed books. 219 p. illus. Lond. 1893.

Trubner. 1.50 (Books about books.)

Humphreys, Henry Noel.

(A) history of the art of printing from its invention to its wide-spread development in the middle of the sixteenth century.

216 p. illus. Lond. 1867. Bernard Quaritch. o.p.

Morley, Henry.

English writers. v.6. Chaucer to Caxton. Lond. 1890.

Cassell. 1.25

Putnam, George Haven.

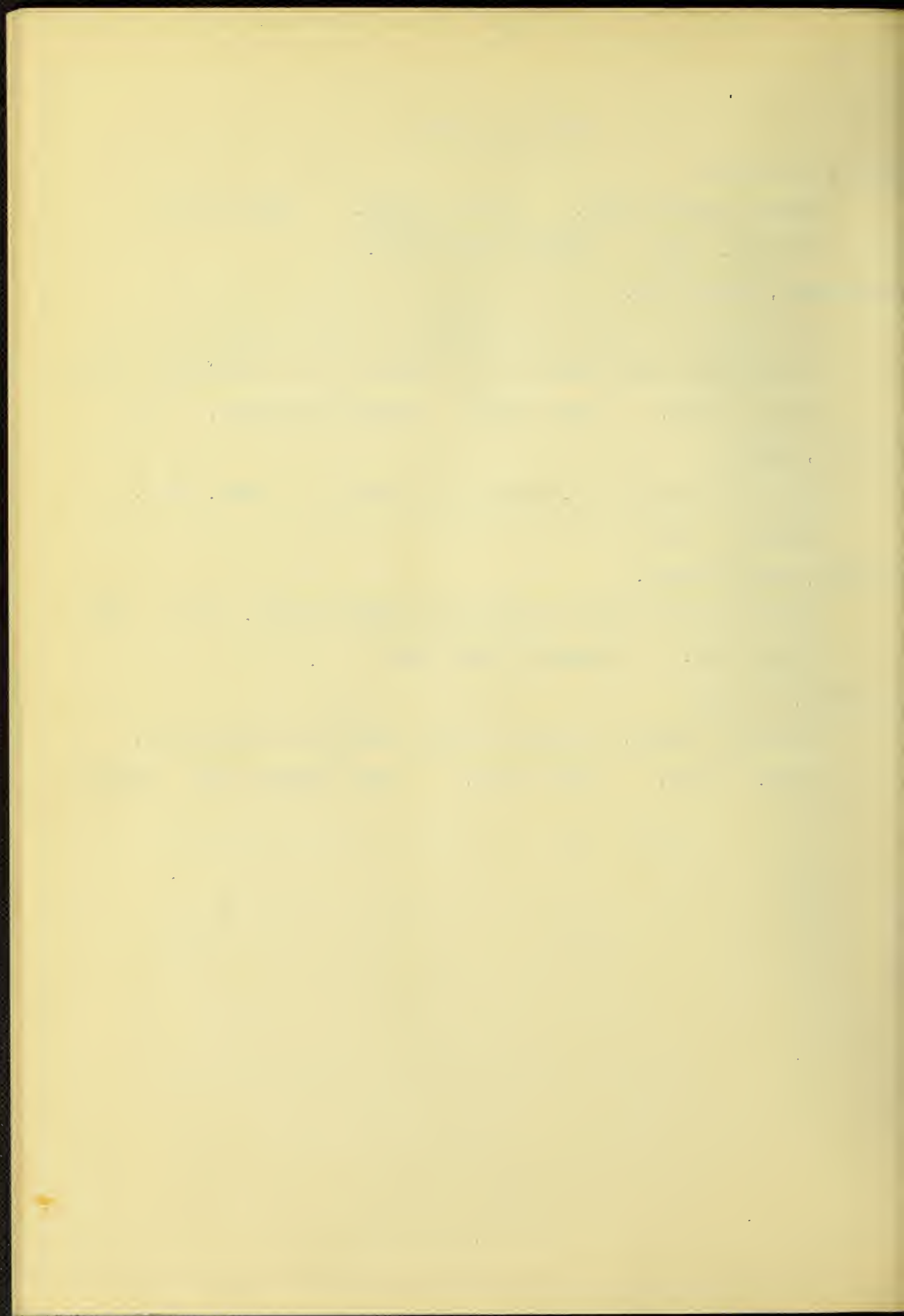
Books and their makers during the Middle Ages... v.2. New

York. 1897. Putnam's sons. 2.50

Roberts, William.

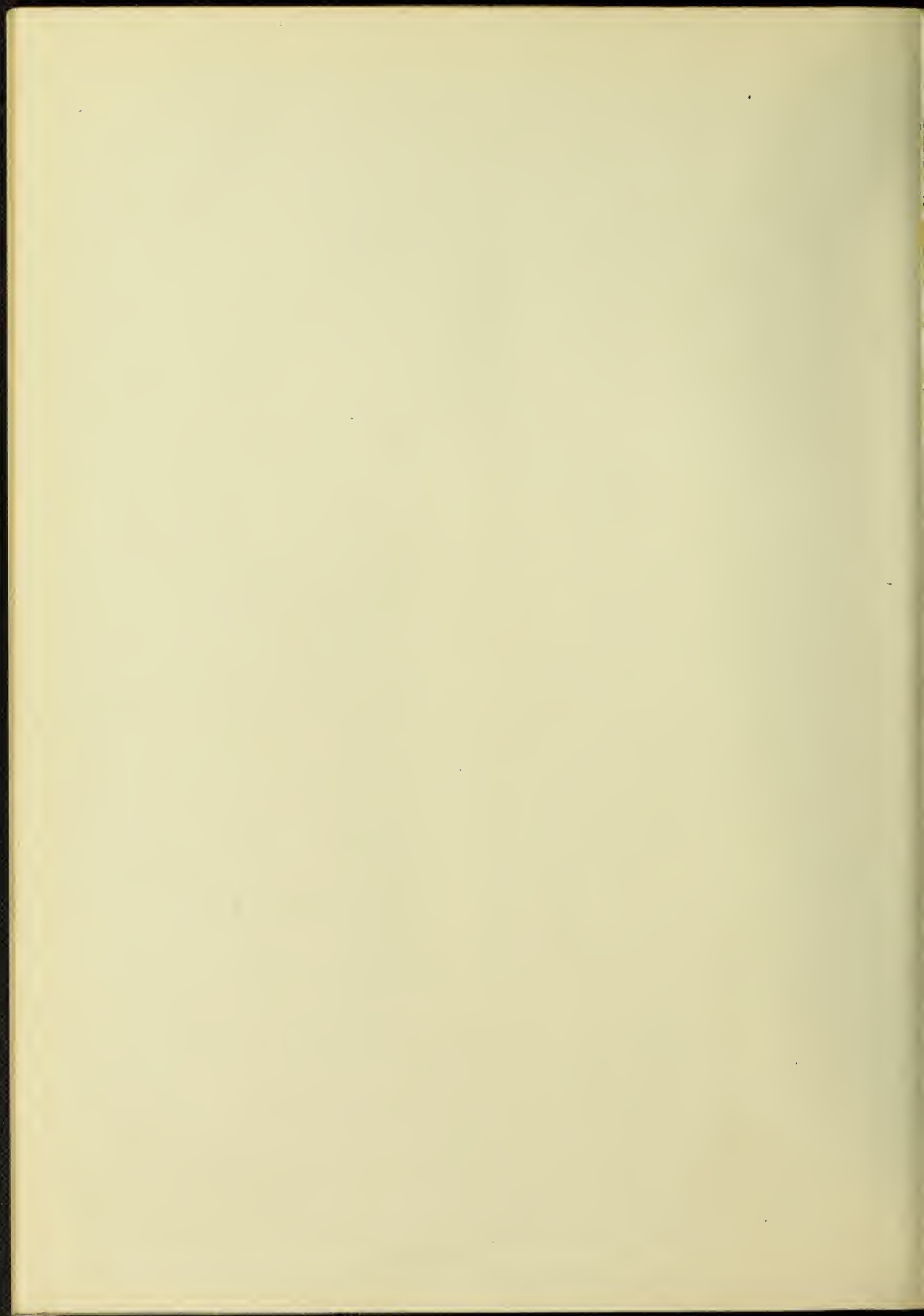
Printers' marks: a chapter in the history of typography.

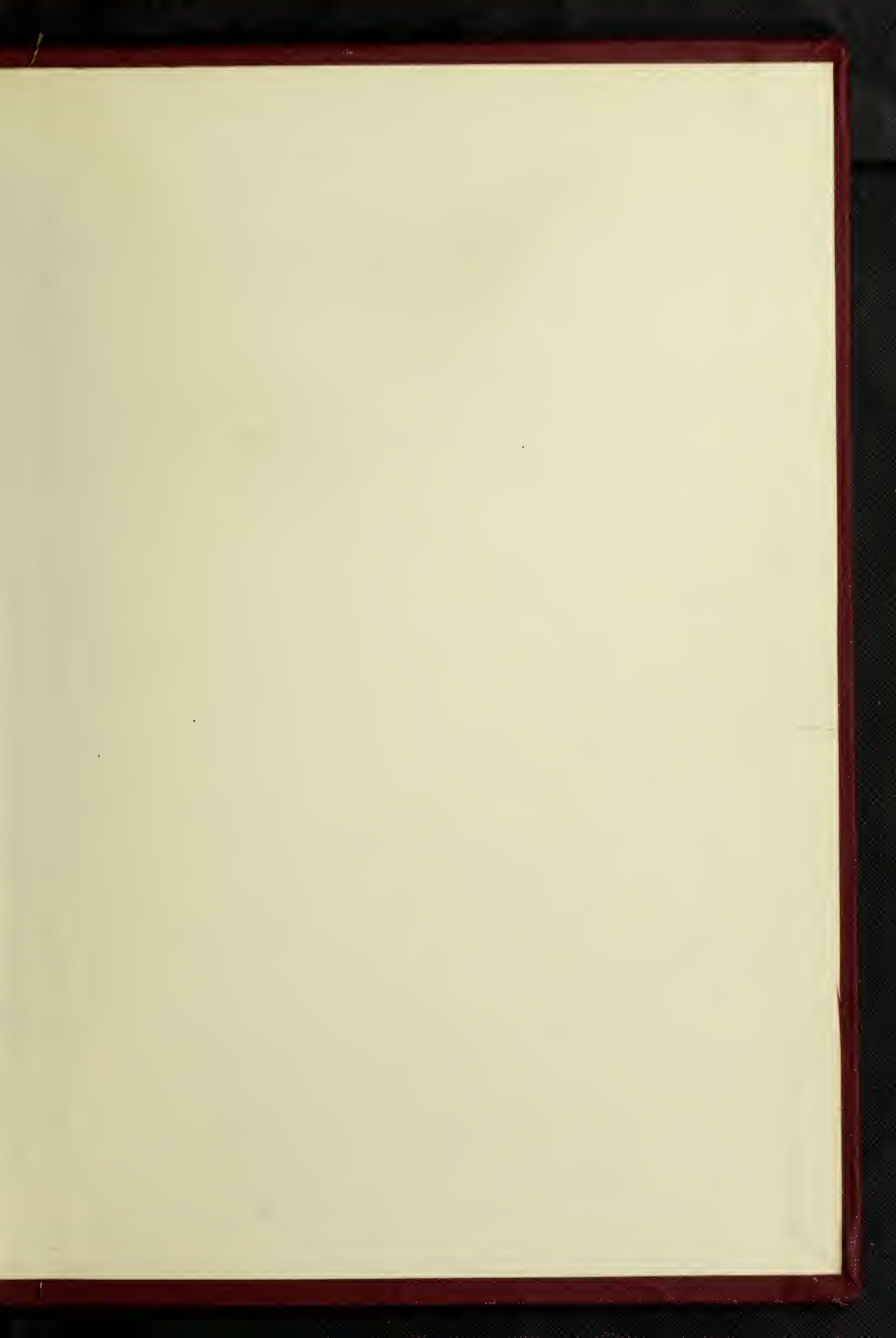
261 p. illus. Lond. 1893. Bell & Sons. o.p. (3.50)



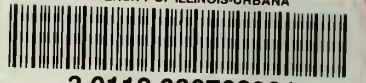
QUESTIONS

1. What were the leading events of Caxton's early life?
2. When and under what circumstances is Caxton supposed to have learned printing?
3. What was the character of Caxton's work as printer compared with printers on the continent?
4. Who were Caxton's contemporary printers in England?
5. What is said of Caxton's work as a writer and translator?
6. Who were Caxton's successors in the 15th century and how did their work compare with his?





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